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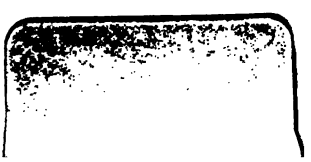






LYSBETH

A TALE OF THE DUTCH













LYSBETH

A TALE OF THE DUTCH

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

ALLAN QUATERMAIN
ALLAN'S WIFE
BEATRICE
CLEOPATRA
COLONEL QUARITCH, V. C.
DAWN
DOCTOR THERNE
ELISSA
ERIC BRIGHTEYES
HEART OF THE WORLD
JESS
JOAN HASTE
KING SOLOMON'S MINES
MAIWA'S REVENGE
MONTEZUMA'S DAUGHTER
MR. MEESON'S WILL
NADA THE LILY
SHE
SWALLOW
THE PEOPLE OF THE MIST
THE WITCH'S HEAD
THE WIZARD

(*In collaboration with Andrew Lang*)

THE WORLD'S DESIRE

A FARMER'S YEAR
CETYWAYO AND HIS WHITE NEIGHBOURS



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"A FOUL, A FOUL!" P. 17.



LYSBETH

A TALE OF THE DUTCH

12495

BY

H. RIDER HAGGARD

AUTHOR OF "JESS," "SHE," "KING SOLOMON'S MINES," "SWALLOW," ETC., ETC.

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DEDICATION

In token of the earnest reverence of a man of a later generation for his character, and for that life work whereof we inherit the fruits to-day, this tale of the times he shaped is dedicated to the memory of one of the greatest and most noble-hearted beings that the world has known; the immortal William, called the Silent, of Nassau.

42X579



AUTHOR'S NOTE

THERE are, roughly, two ways of writing an historical romance—the first to choose some notable and leading characters of the time to be treated, and by the help of history attempt to picture them as they were; the other, to make a study of that time and history with the country in which it was enacted, and from it to deduce the necessary characters.

In the case of "Lysbeth" the author has attempted this second method. By an example of the trials, adventures, and victories of a burgher family of the generation of Philip II. and William the Silent, he strives to set before readers of to-day something of the life of those who lived through perhaps the most fearful tyranny that the western world has known. How did they live, one wonders; how is it that they did not die of very terror, those of them who escaped the scaffold, the famine and the pestilence?

This and another—Why were such things suffered to be?—seem problems worth consideration, especially by the young, who are so apt to take everything for granted, including their own religious freedom and personal security. How often, indeed, do any living folk give a grateful thought to the forefathers who won for us these advantages, and many others with them?

The writer has sometimes heard travellers in the Netherlands express surprise that even in an age of almost universal decoration its noble churches are suffered to remain smeared with melancholy whitewash. Could they look backward through the centuries and behold with the

mind's eye certain scenes that have taken place within these very temples and about their walls, they would marvel no longer. Here we are beginning to forget the smart at the price of which we bought deliverance from the bitter yoke of priest and king, but yonder the sword bit deeper and smote more often. Perhaps that is why in Holland they still love whitewash, which to them may be a symbol, a perpetual protest; and remembering stories that have been handed down as heirlooms to this day, frown at the sight of even the most modest sacerdotal vestment. Those who are acquainted with the facts of their history and deliverance will scarcely wonder at the prejudice.

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Book the First

THE SOWING



Book the First

THE SOWING

CHAPTER I

THE WOLF AND THE BADGER

THE time was in or about the year 1544, when the Emperor Charles V. ruled the Netherlands, and our scene the city of Leyden.

Any one who has visited this pleasant town knows that it lies in the midst of wide, flat meadows, and is intersected by many canals filled with Rhine water. But now, as it was winter, near to Christmas indeed, the meadows and the quaint gabled roofs of the city lay buried beneath a dazzling sheet of snow, while, instead of boats and barges, skaters glided up and down the frozen surface of the canals, which were swept for their convenience. Outside the walls of the town, not far from the Morsch poort, or gate, the surface of the broad moat which surrounded them presented a sight as gay as it was charming. Just here one of the branches of the Rhine ran into this moat, and down it came the pleasure-seekers in sledges, on skates, or afoot. They were dressed, most of them, in their best attire, for the day was a holiday set apart for a kind of skating carnival, with sleighing matches, such games as curling, and other amusements.

Among these merry folk might have been seen a young

lady of two or three and twenty years of age, dressed in a coat of dark green cloth trimmed with fur, and close-fitting at the waist. This coat opened in front, showing a broidered woollen skirt, but over the bust it was tightly buttoned and surmounted by a stiff ruff of Brussels lace. Upon her head she wore a high-crowned beaver hat, to which the nodding ostrich feather was fastened by a jewelled ornament of sufficient value to show that she was a person of some means. In fact, this lady was the only child of a sea captain and shipowner named Carolus van Hout, who, whilst still a middle-aged man, had died about a year before, leaving her heiress to a very considerable fortune. This circumstance, with the added advantages of a very pretty face, in which were set two deep and thoughtful grey eyes, and a figure more graceful than was common among the Netherlander women, caused Lysbeth van Hout to be much sought after and admired, especially by the marriageable bachelors of Leyden.

On this occasion, however, she was unescorted except by a serving woman somewhat older than herself, a native of Brussels, Greta by name, who in appearance was as attractive as in manner she was suspiciously discreet.

As Lysbeth skated down the canal towards the moat many of the good burghers of Leyden took off their caps to her, especially the young burghers, one or two of whom had hopes that she would choose them to be her cavalier for this day's fête. Some of the elders, also, asked her if she would care to join their parties, thinking that, as she was an orphan without near male relations, she might be glad of their protection in times when it was wise for beautiful young women to be protected. With this excuse and that, however, she escaped from them all, for Lysbeth had already made her own arrangements.

At that date there was living in Leyden a young man of four or five and twenty, named Dirk van Goorl, a dis-

tant cousin of her own. Dirk was a native of the little town of Alkmaar, and the second son of one of its leading citizens, a brass founder by trade. As in the natural course of events the Alkmaar business would descend to his elder brother, their father apprenticed him to a Leyden firm, in which, after eight or nine years of hard work, he had become a junior partner. While he was still living, Lysbeth's father had taken a liking to the lad, with the result that he grew intimate at the house which, from the first, was open to him as a kinsman. After the death of Carolus van Hout, Dirk had continued to visit there, especially on Sundays, when he was duly and ceremoniously received by Lysbeth's aunt, a childless widow named Clara van Ziel, who acted as her guardian. Thus, by degrees, favoured with such ample opportunity, a strong affection had sprung up between these two young people, although as yet they were not affianced, nor indeed had either of them said a word of open love to the other.

This abstinence may seem strange, but some explanation of their self-restraint was to be found in Dirk's character. In mind he was patient, very deliberate in forming his purposes, and very sure in carrying them out. He felt impulses like other men, but he did not give way to them. For two years or more he had loved Lysbeth, but being somewhat slow at reading the ways of women he was not quite certain that she loved him, and above everything on earth he dreaded a rebuff. Moreover he knew her to be an heiress, and as his own means were still humble, and his expectations from his father small, he did not feel justified in asking her in marriage until his position was more assured. Had the Captain Carolus still been living the case would have been different, for then he could have gone to him. But he was dead, and Dirk's fine and sensitive nature recoiled from the thought that it might be said of him that he had taken advantage of the inexperience of a

kinswoman in order to win her fortune. Also deep down in his mind he had a sincerer and quite secret reason for reticence, whereof more in its proper place.

Thus matters stood between these two. To-day, however, though only with diffidence and after some encouragement from the lady, he had asked leave to be his cousin's cavalier at the ice fête, and when she consented, readily enough, appointed the moat as their place of meeting. This was somewhat less than Lysbeth expected, for she wished his escort through the town. But, when she hinted as much, Dirk explained that he would not be able to leave the works before three o'clock, as the metal for a large bell had been run into the casting, and he must watch it while it cooled.

So, followed only by her maid, Greta, Lysbeth glided lightly as a bird down the ice path on to the moat, and across it, through the narrow cut, to the frozen mere beyond, where the sports were to be held and the races run. There the scene was very beautiful.

Behind her lay the roofs of Leyden, pointed, picturesque, and covered with sheets of snow, while above them towered the bulk of the two great churches of St. Peter and St. Pancras, and standing on a mound known as the Burg, the round tower which is supposed to have been built by the Romans. In front stretched the flat expanse of white meadows, broken here and there by windmills with narrow waists and thin tall sails, and in the distance, by the church towers of other towns and villages.

Immediately before her, in strange contrast to this lifeless landscape, lay the peopled mere, fringed around with dead reeds standing so still in the frosty air that they might have been painted things. On this mere half the population of Leyden seemed to be gathered ; at least there were thousands of them, shouting, laughing, and skimming to and fro in their bright garments like flocks of gay-plu-

maged birds. Among them, drawn by horses with bells tied to their harness, glided many sledges of wickerwork and wood mounted upon iron runners, their fore-ends fashioned to quaint shapes, such as the heads of dogs or bulls, or Tritons. Then there were vendors of cakes and sweetmeats, vendors of spirits also, who did a good trade on this cold day. Beggars too were numerous, and among them deformities, who, nowadays, would be hidden in charitable homes, slid about in wooden boxes, which they pushed along with crutches. Lastly many loafers had gathered there with stools for fine ladies to sit on while the skates were bound to their pretty feet, and chapmen with these articles for sale and straps wherewith to fasten them. To complete the picture the huge red ball of the sun was sinking to the west, and opposite to it the pale full moon began already to gather light and life.

The scene seemed so charming and so happy that Lysbeth, who was young, and now that she had recovered from the shock of her beloved father's death, light-hearted, ceased her forward movement and poised herself upon her skates to watch it for a space. While she stood thus a little apart, a woman came towards her from the throng, not as though she were seeking her, but aimlessly, much as a child's toy-boat is driven by light, contrary winds upon the summer surface of a pond.

She was a remarkable-looking woman of about thirty-five years of age, tall and bony in make, with deep-set eyes, light grey of colour, that seemed now to flash fiercely and now to waver, as though in memory of some great dread. From beneath a coarse woollen cap a wisp of grizzled hair fell across the forehead, where it lay like the forelock of a horse. Indeed, the high cheekbones, scarred as though by burns, wide-spread nostrils and prominent white teeth, whence the lips had strangely sunk away, gave the whole countenance a more or less equine look which this falling

lock seemed to heighten. For the rest the woman wa poorly and not too plentifully clad in a gown of blac woollen, torn and stained as though with long use an journeys, while on her feet she wore wooden clogs, to whic were strapped skates that were not fellows, one being muc longer than the other.

Opposite to Lysbeth this strange, gaunt person stopped contemplating her with a dreamy eye. Presently sh seemed to recognise her, for she said in a quick, low voice the voice of one who lives in terror of being overheard :—

"That's a pretty dress of yours, Van Hout's daughter Oh, yes, I know you ; your father used to play with m when I was a child, and once he kissed me on the ice a just such a fête as this. Think of it ! Kissed me, Marth the Mare," and she laughed hoarsely, then went on : "Yes well-warmed and well-fed, and, without doubt, waiting fo a gallant to kiss you" ; here she turned and waved he hand towards the people—"all well-warmed and well-fed and all with lovers and husbands and children to kiss. Bu I tell you, Van Hout's daughter, as I have dared to creep from my hiding hole in the great lake to tell all of them who will listen, that unless they cast out the cursed Span iard, a day shall come when the folk of Leyden must per ish by thousands of hunger behind those walls. Yes, yes unless they cast out the cursed Spaniard and his Inquisi tion. Oh, I know him, I know him, for did they not mak me carry my own husband to the stake upon my back And have you heard why, Van Hout's daughter? 'Becaus what I had suffered in their torture-dens had made m face—yes, mine that once was so beautiful—like the fac of a horse, and they said that 'a horse ought to be ridden.'"

Now, while this poor excited creature, one of a whol class of such people who in those sad days might be found wandering about the Netherlands crazy with their grief and sufferings, and living only for revenge, poured ou

these broken sentences, Lysbeth, terrified, shrank back before her. As she shrank the other followed, till presently Lysbeth saw her expression of rage and hate change to one of terror. In another instant, muttering something about a request for alms which she did not wait to receive, the woman had wheeled round and fled away as fast as her skates would carry her—which was very fast indeed.

Turning about to find what had frightened her, Lysbeth saw standing on the bank of the mere, so close that she must have overheard every word, but behind the screen of a leafless bush, a tall, forbidding-looking woman, who held in her hand some broidered caps which apparently she was offering for sale. These caps she began slowly to fold up and place one by one in a hide satchel that was hung about her shoulders. All this while she was watching Lysbeth with her keen black eyes, except when from time to time she took them off her to follow the flight of that person who had called herself the Mare.

"You keep ill company, lady," said the cap-seller in a harsh voice.

"It was none of my seeking," answered Lysbeth, astonished into making a reply.

"So much the better for you, lady, although she seemed to know you and to know also that you would listen to her song. Unless my eyes deceived me, which is not often, that woman is an evil-doer and a worker of magic like her dead husband Van Muyden; a heretic, a blasphemer of the Holy Church, a traitor to our Lord the Emperor, and one," she added with a snarl, "with a price upon her head that before night will, I hope, be in Black Meg's pocket." Then, walking with long firm steps towards a fat man who seemed to be waiting for her, the tall, black-eyed pedlar passed with him into the throng, where Lysbeth lost sight of them.

Lysbeth watched them go, and shivered. To her knowl-

edge she had never seen this woman before, but she knew enough of the times they lived in to be sure that she was a spy of the priests. Already there were such creatures moving about in every gathering, yes, and in many a private place, who were paid to obtain evidence against suspected heretics. Whether they won it by fair means or by foul mattered not, provided they could find something, and it need be little indeed, to justify the Inquisition in getting to its work.

As for the other woman, the Mare, doubtless she was one of those wicked outcasts, accursed by God and man, who were called heretics; people who said dreadful things about the Pope and the Church and God's priests, having been misled and stirred up thereto by a certain fiend in human form named Luther. Lysbeth shuddered at the thought and crossed herself, for in those days she was an excellent Catholic. Yet the wanderer said that she had known her father, so that she must be as well born as herself—and then that dreadful story—no, she could not bear to think of it. But of course heretics deserved all these things; of that there could be no doubt whatever, for had not her father confessor told her that thus alone might their souls be saved from the grasp of the Evil One?

The thought was comforting, still Lysbeth felt upset, and not a little rejoiced when she saw Dirk van Goorl skating towards her accompanied by another young man, also a cousin of her own on her mother's side who was destined in days to come to earn himself an immortal renown—young Pieter van de Werff. The two took off their bonnets to her, Dirk van Goorl revealing in the act a head of fair hair beneath which his steady blue eyes shone in a rather thick-set, self-contained face. Lysbeth's temper, always somewhat quick, was ruffled, and she showed it in her manner.

"I thought, cousins, that we were to meet at three,

the kirk clock yonder has just chimed half-past," she said, addressing them both, but looking—not too sweetly—at Dirk van Goorl.

"That's right, cousin," answered Pieter, a pleasant-faced and alert young man, "look at *him*, scold *him*, for he is to blame. Ever since a quarter past two have I—I who must drive a sledge in the great race and am backed to win—been waiting outside that factory in the snow, but, upon my honour, he did not appear until seven minutes since. Yes, we have done the whole distance in seven minutes, and I call that very good skating."

"I thought as much," said Lysbeth. "Dirk can only keep an appointment with a church bell or a stadhuis chandelier."

"It was not my fault," broke in Dirk in his slow voice; "I have my business to attend. I promised to wait until the metal had cooled sufficiently, and hot bronze takes no account of ice-parties and sledge races."

"So I suppose that you stopped to blow on it, cousin. Well, the result is that, being quite unescorted, I have been obliged to listen to things which I did not wish to hear."

"What do you mean?" asked Dirk, taking fire at once.

Then she told them something of what the woman who called herself the Mare had said to her, adding, "Doubtless the poor creature is a heretic and deserves all that has happened to her. But it is dreadfully sad, and I came here to enjoy myself, not to be sad."

Between the two young men there passed a glance which was full of meaning. But it was Dirk who spoke. The other, more cautious, remained silent.

"Why do you say that, Cousin Lysbeth?" he asked in a new voice, a voice thick and eager. "Why do you say that she deserves all that can happen to her? I have heard of this poor creature who is called Mother Martha, or the Mare, although I have never seen her myself. She was

noble-born, much better born than any of us three, and very fair—once they called her the Lily of Brussels—when she was the Vrouw van Muyden, and she has suffered dreadfully, for one reason only, because she and hers did not worship God as you worship Him."

"As we worship Him," broke in Van de Werff with a cough.

"No," answered Dirk sullenly, "as our Cousin Lysbeth van Hout worships Him. For that reason only they killed her husband and her little son, and drove her mad, so that she lives among the reeds of the Haarlemer Mere like a beast in its den; yes, they, the Spaniards and their Spanish priests, as I daresay that they will kill us also."

"Don't you think that it is getting rather cold standing here?" interrupted Pieter van de Werff before she could answer. "Look, the sledge races are just beginning. Come, cousin, give me your hand," and, taking Lysbeth by the arm, he skated off into the throng, followed at a distance by Dirk and the serving-maid, Greta.

"Cousin," he whispered as he went, "this is not my place, it is Dirk's place, but I pray you as you love him—I beg your pardon—as you esteem a worthy relative—do not enter into a religious argument with him here in public, where even the ice and sky are two great ears. It is not safe, little cousin, I swear to you that it is not safe."

In the centre of the mere the great event of the day, the sledge races, were now in progress. As the competitors were many these must be run in heats, the winners of each heat standing on one side to compete in the final contest. Now these victors had a pretty prerogative not unlike that accorded to certain dancers in the cotillion of modern days. Each driver of a sledge was bound to carry a passenger in the little car in front of him, his own place being on the seat behind, whence he directed the horse by means of reins supported upon a guide-rod so fashioned that it

lifted them above the head of the traveller in the car. This passenger he could select from among the number of ladies who were present at the games; unless, indeed, the gentleman in charge of her chose to deny him in set form; namely, by stepping forward and saying in the appointed phrase, "No, for this happy hour she is mine."

Among the winners of these heats was a certain Spanish officer, the Count Don Juan de Montalvo, who, as it chanced, in the absence on leave of his captain, was at that date the commander of the garrison at Leyden. He was a man still young, only about thirty indeed, reported to be of noble birth, and handsome in the usual Castilian fashion. That is to say, he was tall, of a graceful figure, dark-eyed, strong-featured, with a somewhat humorous expression, and of very good if exaggerated address. As he had but recently come to Leyden, very little was known there of this attractive cavalier beyond that he was well spoken of by the priests and, according to report, a favourite with the Emperor. Also the ladies admired him much.

For the rest everything about him was handsome like his person, as might be expected in the case of a man reputed to be as rich as he was noble. Thus his sledge was shaped and coloured to resemble a great black wolf rearing itself up to charge. The wooden head was covered in wolf skin and adorned by eyes of yellow glass and great fangs of ivory. Round the neck also ran a gilded collar hung with a silver shield, whereon were painted the arms of its owner, a knight striking the chains from off a captive Christian saint, and the motto of the Montalvos, "Trust to God and me." His black horse, too, of the best breed, imported from Spain, glittered in harness decorated with gilding, and bore a splendid plume of dyed feathers rising from the head-band.

Lysbeth happened to be standing near to the spot where this gallant had halted after his first victory. She was in

the company of Dirk van Goorl alone—for as he was the driver of one of the competing sledges, her other cousin, Pieter van de Werff, had now been summoned away. Having nothing else to do at the moment, she approached and not unnaturally admired this brilliant equipage, although in truth it was the sledge and the horse rather than their driver which attracted her attention. As for the Count himself she knew him slightly, having been introduced to and danced a measure with him at a festival given by a grandee of the town. On that occasion he was courteous to her in the Spanish fashion, rather too courteous, she thought, but as this was the manner of Castilian dons when dealing with burgher maidens she paid no more attention to the matter.

The Captain Montalvo saw Lysbeth among the throng and recognised her, for he lifted his plumed hat and bowed to her with just that touch of condescension which in those days a Spaniard showed when greeting one whom he considered his inferior. In the sixteenth century it was understood that all the world were the inferiors to those whom God had granted to be born in Spain, the English who rated themselves at a valuation of their own—and were careful to announce the fact—alone excepted.

An hour or so later, after the last heat had been run, a steward of the ceremonies called aloud to the remaining competitors to select their passengers and prepare for the final contest. Accordingly each Jehu, leaving his horse in charge of an attendant, stepped up to some young lady who evidently was waiting for him, and led her by the hand to his sledge. While Lysbeth was watching this ceremony with amusement—for these selections were always understood to show a strong preference on behalf of the chooser for the chosen—she was astonished to hear a well-trained voice addressing her, and on looking up to see Don Juan de Montalvo bowing almost to the ice.

"Señora," he said in Castilian, a tongue which Lysbeth understood well enough, although she only spoke it when obliged, "unless my ears deceived me, I heard you admiring my horse and sledge. Now, with the permission of your cavalier," and he bowed courteously to Dirk, "I name you as my passenger for the great race, knowing that you will bring me fortune. Have I your leave, Señor?"

Now if there was a people on earth whom Dirk van Goorl hated, the Spaniards were that people, and if there lived a cavalier whom he preferred should not take his cousin Lysbeth for a lonely drive, that cavalier was the Count Juan de Montalvo. But as a young man, Dirk was singularly diffident and so easily confused that on the spur of the moment it was quite possible for a person of address to make him say what he did not mean. Thus, on the present occasion, when he saw this courtly Spaniard bowing low to him, a humble Dutch tradesman, he was overwhelmed, and mumbled in reply, "Certainly, certainly."

If a glance could have withered him, without doubt Dirk would immediately have shrivelled to nothing. To say that Lysbeth was angry is too little, for in truth she was absolutely furious. She did not like this Spaniard, and hated the idea of a long interview with him alone. Moreover, she knew that among her fellow townspeople there was a great desire that the Count should not win this race, which in its own fashion was the event of the year, whereas, if she appeared as his companion it would be supposed that she was anxious for his success. Lastly—and this was the chiefest sore—although in theory the competitors had a right to ask any one to whom they took a fancy to travel in their sledges, in practice they only sought the company of young women with whom they were on the best of terms, and who were already warned of their intention.

In an instant these thoughts flashed through her mind,

but all she did was to murmur something about the Heer van Goorl—

"Has already given his consent, like an unselfish gentleman," broke in Captain Juan tendering her his hand.

Now, without absolutely making a scene, which then, as to-day, ladies considered an ill-bred thing to do, there was no escape, since half Leyden gathered at these "sledge choosings," and many eyes were on her and the Count. Therefore, because she must, Lysbeth took the proffered hand, and was led to the sledge, catching, as she passed to it through the throng, more than one sour look from the men and more than one exclamation of surprise, real or affected, on the lips of the ladies of her acquaintance. These manifestations, however, put her upon her mettle. So determining that at least she would not look sullen or ridiculous, she began to enter into the spirit of the adventure, and smiled graciously while the Captain Montalvo wrapped a magnificent apron of wolf skins about her knees.

When all was ready her charioteer took the reins and settled himself upon the little seat behind the sleigh, which was then led into line by a soldier servant.

"Where is the course, Señor?" Lysbeth asked, hoping that it would be a short one.

But in this she was to be disappointed, for he answered:

"Up to the little Quarkel Mere, round the island in the middle of it, and back to this spot, something over a league in all. Now, Señora, speak to me no more at present, but hold fast and have no fear, for at least I drive well, and my horse is sure-footed and roughed for ice. This is a race that I would give a hundred gold pieces to win, since your countrymen, who contend against me, have sworn that I shall lose it, and I tell you at once, Señora, that grey horse will press me hard."

Following the direction of his glance, Lysbeth's eye lit

upon the next sledge. It was small, fashioned and painted to resemble a grey badger, that silent, stubborn, and, if molested, savage brute, which will not loose its grip until the head is hacked from off its body. The horse, which matched it well in colour, was of Flemish breed ; rather a raw-boned animal, with strong quarters and an ugly head, but renowned in Leyden for its courage and staying power. What interested Lysbeth most, however, was to discover that the charioteer was none other than Pieter van de Werff, though now when she thought of it, she remembered he had told her that his sledge was named the Badger. In his choice of passenger she noted, too, not without a smile, that he showed his cautious character, disdainful of any immediate glory, so long as the end in view could be attained. For there in the sleigh sat no fine young lady, decked out in brave attire, who might be supposed to look at him with tender eyes, but a little fair-haired mate aged nine, who was in fact his sister. As he explained afterwards, the rules provided that a lady passenger must be carried, but said nothing of her age and weight.

Now the competitors, eight of them, were in a line, and coming forward, the master of the course, in a voice that every one might hear, called out the conditions of the race and the prize for which it was to be run, a splendid glass goblet engraved with the cross-keys, the Arms of Leyden. This done, after asking if all were ready, he dropped a little flag, whereon the horses were loosed and away they went.

Before a minute had passed, forgetting all her doubts and annoyances, Lysbeth was lost in the glorious excitement of the moment. Like birds in the heavens, cleaving the keen, crisp air, they sped forward over the smooth ice. The gay throng vanished, the dead reeds and stark bushes seemed to fly away from them. The only sounds in their ears were the rushing of the wind, the swish of the iron

runners, and the hollow tapping of the hooves of their galloping horses. Certain sledges drew ahead in the first burst, but the Wolf and the Badger were not among these. The Count de Montalvo was holding in his black stallion, and as yet the grey Flemish gelding looped along with a constrained and awkward stride. When, passing from the little mere, they entered the straight of the canal, these two were respectively fourth and fifth. Up the course they sped, through a deserted snow-clad country, past the church of the village of Alkemaade. Now, half a mile or more away appeared the Quarkel Mere, and in the centre of it the island which they must turn. They reached it, they were round it, and when their faces were once more set homewards, Lysbeth noted that the Wolf and the Badger were third and fourth in the race, some one having dropped behind. Half a mile more and they were second and third ; another half mile and they were first and second with perhaps a mile to go. Then the fight began.

Yard by yard the speed increased, and yard by yard the black stallion drew ahead. Now in front of them lay a furlong or more of bad ice encumbered with lumps of frozen snow that had not been cleared away, which caused the sleigh to shake and jump as it struck. Lysbeth looked round.

"The Badger is coming up," she said.

Montalvo heard, and for the first time laid his whip upon the haunches of his horse, which answered gallantly. But still the Badger came up. The grey was the stronger beast, and had begun to put out his strength. Presently his ugly head was behind them, for Lysbeth felt the breath from his nostrils blowing on her, and saw their steam. Then it was past, for the steam blew back into her face ; yes, and she could see the eager eyes of the child in the grey sledge. Now they were neck and neck, and the rough ice was done with. Six hundred yards away, not more, lay the goal,

and all about them, outside the line of the course, were swift skaters travelling so fast that their heads were bent forward and down to within three feet of the ice.

Van de Werff called to his horse, and the grey began to gain. Montalvo lashed the stallion, and once more they passed him. But the black was failing, and he saw it, for Lysbeth heard him curse in Spanish. Then of a sudden, after a cunning glance at his adversary, the Count pulled upon the right rein, and a shrill voice rose upon the air, the voice of the little girl in the other sledge.

"Take care, brother," it cried, "he will overthrow us."

True enough, in another moment the black would have struck the grey sideways. Lysbeth saw Van de Werff rise from his seat and throw his weight backward, dragging the grey on to his haunches. By an inch—not more—the Wolf sleigh missed the gelding. Indeed, one runner of it struck his hoof, and the high woodwork of the side brushed and cut his nostril.

"A foul, a foul!" yelled the skaters, and it was over. Once more they were speeding forward, but now the black had a lead of at least ten yards, for the grey must find his stride again. They were in the straight; the course was lined with hundreds of witnesses, and from the throats of every one of them arose a great cry, or rather two cries.

"The Spaniard, the Spaniard wins!" said the first cry that was answered by another and a deeper roar.

"No, Hollander, the Hollander! The Hollander comes up!"

Then in the midst of that fierce excitement—bred of the excitement perhaps—some curious spell fell upon the mind of Lysbeth. The race, its details, its objects, its surroundings faded away; these physical things were gone, and in place of them was present a dream, a spiritual interpretation such as the omens and influences of the times she lived in might well inspire. What did she seem to see?

She saw the Spaniard and the Hollander striving for victory, but not a victory of horses. She saw the black Spanish Wolf, at first triumphant, outmatch the Netherland Badger. Still, the Badger, the dogged Dutch badger, held on.

"Who would win?" The fierce beast or the patient beast? Who would be master in this fight? There was death in it. Look, the whole snow was red, the roofs of Leyden were red, and red the heavens; in the deep hues of the sunset they seemed bathed in blood, while about her the shouts of the backers and factions transformed themselves into a fierce cry as of battling peoples. All voices mingled in that cry—voices of hope, of agony, and of despair; but she could not interpret them. Something told her that the interpretation and the issue were in the mind of God alone.

Perhaps she swooned, perhaps she slept and dreamed this dream; perhaps the sharp rushing air overcame her. At the least Lysbeth's eyes closed and her mind gave way. When they opened and it returned again their sledge was rushing past the winning post. But in front of it travelled another sledge, drawn by a gaunt grey horse, which galloped so hard that its belly seemed to lie upon the ice, a horse driven by a young man whose face was set like steel and whose lips were as the lips of a trap.

"Could that be the face of her cousin Pieter van de Werff, and, if so, what passion had stamped that strange seal thereon?" She turned herself in her seat and looked at him who drove her.

Was this a man, or was it a spirit escaped from doom? Blessed Mother of Christ! what a countenance! The eyeballs starting and upturned, nothing but the white of them to be seen; the lips curled, and, between, two lines of shining fangs; the lifted points of the mustachios touching the high cheekbones. No—no, it was neither a spirit nor

a man, she knew now what it was; it was the very type and incarnation of the Spanish Wolf.

Once more she seemed to faint, while in her ears there rang the cry—"The Hollander! Outstayed! Outstayed! Conquered is the accursed Spaniard!"

Then Lysbeth knew that it was over, and again the faintness overpowered her.

CHAPTER II

SHE WHO BUYS—PAYS

WHEN Lysbeth's mind recovered from its confusion she found herself still in the sledge and beyond the borders of the crowd that was engaged in rapturously congratulating the winner. Drawn up alongside of the Wolf was another sleigh of plain make, and harnessed to it a heavy Flemish horse. This vehicle was driven by a Spanish soldier, with whom sat a second soldier apparently of the rank of sergeant. There was no one else near; already people in the Netherlands had learnt to keep their distance from Spanish soldiers.

"If your Excellency would come now," the sergeant was saying, "this little matter can be settled without any further trouble."

"Where is she?" asked Montalvo.

"Not more than a mile or so away, near the place called Steene Veld."

"Tie her up in the snow to wait till to-morrow morning. My horse is tired and it may save us trouble," he began, then added, after glancing first back at the crowd behind him and next at Lysbeth, "no, I will come."

Perhaps the Count did not wish to listen to condolences on his defeat, or perhaps he desired to prolong the *tête-à-tête* with his fair passenger. At any rate, without further hesitation, he struck his weary horse with the whip, causing it to amble forward somewhat stiffly but at a good pace.

"Where are we going, Señor?" asked Lysbeth anxiously. "The race is over and I must seek my friends."

"Your friends are engaged in congratulating the victor, lady," he answered in his suave and courteous voice, "and

I cannot leave you alone upon the ice. Do not trouble; this is only a little matter of business which will scarcely take a quarter of an hour," and once more he struck the horse urging it to a better speed.

Lysbeth thought of remonstrating, she thought even of springing from the sledge, but in the end she did neither. To seem to continue the drive with her cavalier would, she determined, look more natural and less absurd than to attempt a violent escape from him. She was certain that he would not put her down merely at her request; something in his manner told her so, and though she had no longing for his company it was better than being made ridiculous before half the inhabitants of Leyden. Moreover, the position was no fault of hers; it was the fault of Dirk van Goorl, who should have been present to take her from the sledge.

As they drove along the frozen moat Montalvo leant forward and began to chat about the race, expressing regret at having lost it, but using no angry or bitter words. Could this be the man, wondered Lysbeth as she listened, whom she had seen deliberately attempt to overthrow his adversary in a foul heedless of dishonour or of who might be killed by the shock? Could this be the man whose face just now had looked like the face of a devil? Had these things happened, indeed, or was it not possible that her fancy, confused with the excitement and the speed at which they were travelling, had deceived her? Certainly it seemed to have been overcome at last, for she could not remember the actual finish of the race, or how they got clear of the shouting crowd.

While she was still wondering thus, replying from time to time to Montalvo in monosyllables, the sledge in front of them turned the corner of one of the eastern bastions and came to a halt. The place where it stopped was desolate and lonely, for the town being in a state of peace no

guard was mounted on the wall, nor could any living soul be found upon the snowy waste that lay beyond the moat. At first, indeed, Lysbeth was able to see nobody at all, for by now the sun had gone down and her eyes were not accustomed to the increasing light of the moon. Presently, however, she caught sight of a knot of people standing on the ice in a recess or little bay of the moat, and half hidden by a fringe of dead reeds.

Montalvo saw also, and halted his horse within three paces of them. The people were five in number, three Spanish soldiers and two women. Lysbeth looked, and with difficulty stifled a cry of surprise and fear, for she knew the women. The tall, dark person, with lowering eyes, was none other than the cap-seller and Spanish spy, Black Meg. And she who crouched there upon the ice, her arms bound behind her, her grizzled locks, torn loose by some rough hand, trailing on the snow—surely it was the woman who called herself the Mare, and who that very afternoon spoke to her, saying that she had known her father, and cursing the Spaniards and their Inquisition. What were they doing here? Instantly an answer leapt into her mind, for she remembered Black Meg's words,—that there was a price upon this heretic's head which before nightfall would be in her pocket. And why was there a square hole cut in the ice immediately in front of the captive? Could it be—no, that was too horrible.

"Well, officer," broke in Montalvo, addressing the sergeant in a quiet, wearied voice, "what is all this about? Set out your case."

"Excellency," replied the man, "it is a very simple matter. This creature here, so that woman is ready to take oath," and he pointed to Black Meg, "is a notorious heretic who has already been condemned to death by the Holy Office, and whose husband, a learned man who painted pictures and studied the stars, was burnt on a

charge of witchcraft and heresy, two years ago at Brussels. But she managed to escape the stake, and since then has lived as a vagrant, hiding in the islands of the Haarlemer Mere, and, it is suspected, working murder and robbery on any of Spanish blood whom she can catch. Now she has been caught herself and identified, and, of course, the sentence being in full force against her, can be dealt with at once on your Excellency's command. Indeed, it would not have been necessary that you should be troubled about the thing at all had it not been that this worthy woman," and again he pointed to Black Meg, "who was the one who waylaid her, pulled her down and held her until we came, requires your certificate in order that she may claim the reward from the Treasurer of the Holy Inquisition. Therefore, you will be asked to certify that this is, indeed, the notorious heretic commonly known as Martha the Mare, but whose other name I forget, after which, if you will please to withdraw, we will see to the rest."

"You mean that she will be taken to the prison to be dealt with by the Holy Office?" queried Montalvo.

"Not exactly, Excellency," answered the sergeant with a discreet smile and a cough. "The prison, I am told, is quite full, but she may start for the prison and—there seems to be a hole in the ice into which, since Satan leads the footsteps of such people as stray, this heretic might chance to fall—or throw herself."

"What is the evidence?" asked Montalvo.

Then Black Meg stood forward, and, with the rapidity and unction of a spy, poured out her tale. She identified the woman with one whom she had known who was sentenced to death by the Inquisition and escaped, and, after giving other evidence, ended by repeating the conversation which she had overheard between the accused and Lysbeth that afternoon.

"You accompanied me in a fortunate hour, Señora van

Hout," said the captain gaily, "for now, to satisfy myself, as I wish to be just, and do not trust these paid hags," and he nodded towards Black Meg, "I must ask you upon your oath before God whether or no you confirm that woman's tale, and whether or no this very ugly person named the Mare called down curses upon my people and the Holy Office? Answer, and quickly, if you please, Señora, for it grows cold here and my horse is beginning to shiver."

Then, for the first time, the Mare raised her head, dragging at her hair, which had become frozen to the ice, until she tore it free.

"Lysbeth van Hout," she cried in shrill, piercing tones, "would you, to please your Spanish lover, bring your father's playmate to her death? The Spanish horse is cold and cannot stay, but the poor Netherland Mare—ah! she may be thrust beneath the blue ice and bide there till her bones rot at the bottom of the moat. You have sought the Spaniards, you, whose blood should have warned you against them, and I tell you that it shall cost you dear; but if you say this word they seek, then it shall cost you everything, not only the body, but the spirit also. Woe to you, Lysbeth van Hout, if you cut me off before my work is done. I fear not death, nay I welcome it, but I tell you I have work to do before I die."

Now, in an agony of mind, Lysbeth turned and looked at Montalvo.

The Count was a man of keen perceptions, and understood it all. Leaning forward, his arm resting on the back of the sledge, as though to contemplate the prisoner, he whispered into Lysbeth's ear, so low that no one else could hear his words.

"Señora," he said, "I have no wishes in this matter. I do not desire to drown that poor mad woman, but if you confirm the spy's story, drown she must. At

present I am not satisfied, so everything turns upon your evidence. I do not know what passed between you this afternoon, and personally I do not care, only, if you should chance to have no clear recollection of the matter alleged, I must make one or two little stipulations—very little ones. Let me see, they are—that you will spend the rest of this evening's fête in my company. Further, that whenever I choose to call upon you, your door will be open to me, though I must remind you that, on three occasions already, when I have wished to pay my respects, it has been shut."

Lysbeth heard and understood. If she would save this woman's life she must expose herself to the attentions of the Spaniard, which she desired least of anything in the world. More, speaking upon her oath in the presence of God, she must utter a dreadful lie, she who as yet had never lied. For thirty seconds or more she thought, staring round her with anguished eyes, while the scene they fell on sank into her soul in such fashion that never till her death's day did she forget its aspect.

The Mare spoke no more, she only knelt searching her face with a stern and wondering glance. A little to the right stood Black Meg, glaring at her sullenly, for the blood-money was in danger. Behind the prisoner were two of the soldiers, one putting his hand to his face to hide a yawn, while the other beat his breast to warm himself. The third soldier, who was placed somewhat in front, stirred the surface of the hole with the shaft of his halbert to break up the thin film of ice which was forming over it, while Montalvo himself, still leaning sideways and forwards, watched her eyes with an amused and cynical expression. And over all, over the desolate snows and gabled roofs of the town behind; over the smooth blue ice, the martyr and the murderers; over the gay sledge and the fur-wrapped girl who sat within it, fell the calm light of the

moon through a silence broken only by the beating of her heart, and now and again by the sigh of a frost-wind breathing among the rushes.

"Well, Señora," asked Montalvo, "if you have sufficiently reflected shall I administer the oath in the form provided?"

"Administer it," she said hoarsely.

So, descending from the sledge, he stood in front of Lysbeth, and, lifting his cap, repeated the oath to her, an oath strong enough to blast her soul if she swore to it with false intent.

"In the name of God the Son and of His Blessed Mother, you swear?" he asked.

"I swear," she answered.

"Good, Señora. Now listen to me. Did you meet that woman this afternoon?"

"Yes, I met her on the ice."

"And did she in your hearing utter curses upon the Government and the Holy Church, and call upon you to assist in driving the Spaniards from the land, as this spy, whom I believe is called Black Meg, has borne witness?"

"No," said Lysbeth.

"I am afraid that is not quite enough, Señora; I may have misquoted the exact words. Did the woman say anything of the sort?"

For one second Lysbeth hesitated. Then she caught sight of the victim's watching, speculative eyes, and remembered that this crazed and broken creature once had been a child whom her father kissed and played with, and that the crime of which she was accused was that she had escaped from death at the stake.

"The water is cold to die in!" the Mare said, in a meditative voice, as though she were thinking aloud.

"Then why did you run away from the warm fire, heretic witch?" jeered Black Meg.

Now Lysbeth hesitated no longer, but again answered in a monosyllable, "No."

"Then what did she do or say, Señora?"

"She said she had known my father who used to play with her when she was a child, and begged for alms, that is all. Then that woman came up, and she ran away, whereon the woman said there was a price upon her head, and that she meant to have the money."

"It is a lie," screamed Black Meg in fierce, strident notes.

"If that person will not be silent, silence her," said Montalvo, addressing the sergeant. "I am satisfied," he went on, "that there is no evidence at all against the prisoner except the story of a spy, who says she believes her to be a vagrant heretic of bad character who escaped from the stake several years ago in the neighbourhood of Brussels, whither it is scarcely worth while to send to inquire about the matter. So that charge may drop. There remains the question as to whether or no the prisoner uttered certain words this afternoon, which, if she did utter them, are undoubtedly worthy of the death that, under my authority as acting commandant of this town, I have power to inflict. This question I foresaw, and that is why I asked the Señora, to whom the woman is alleged to have spoken the words, to accompany me here to give evidence. She has done so, and her evidence on oath as against the statement of a spy woman not on oath, is that no such words were spoken. This being so, as the Señora is a good Catholic whom I have no reason to disbelieve, I order the release of the prisoner, whom for my part I take for nothing more than a crazy and harmless wanderer."

"At least you will detain her till I can prove that she is the heretic who escaped from the stake near Brussels," shouted Black Meg.

"I will do nothing of the sort; the prison here is overfull already. Untie her arms and let her go."

The soldiers obeyed, wondering somewhat, and the Mare scrambled to her feet. For a moment she stood looking at her deliverer. Then crying, "We shall meet again, Lysbeth van Hout!" suddenly she turned and sped up a dyke at extraordinary speed. In a few seconds there was nothing to be seen of her but a black spot upon the white landscape, and presently she had vanished altogether.

"Gallop as you will, Mare, I shall catch you yet," screamed Black Meg after her. "And you too, my pretty little liar, who have cheated me out of a dozen florins. Wait till you are up before the Inquisition as a heretic—for that's where you'll end. No fine Spanish lover will save you then. So you have gone to the Spanish, have you, and thrown over your fat-faced burgher; well, you will have enough of Spaniards before you have done with them, I can tell you."

Twice had Montalvo tried to stop this flood of furious eloquence, which had become personal and might prove prejudicial to his interests, but without avail. Now he adopted other measures.

"Seize her," he shouted to two of the soldiers; "that's it; now hold her under water in that hole till I tell you to let her up again."

They obeyed, but it took all three of them to carry out the order, for Black Meg fought and bit like a wild cat, until at last she was thrust into the icy moat head downwards. When at length she was released, soaked and shivering, she crept off silently enough, but the look of fury which she cast at Montalvo and Lysbeth drew from the captain a remark that perhaps it would have been as well to have kept her under water two minutes longer.

"Now, sergeant," he added, in a genial voice, "it is a cold night, and this has been a troublesome business for a feast-day, so here's something for you and your watch to warm yourselves with when you go off duty," and he

handed him what in those days was a very handsome present. "By the way," he said, as the men saluted him gratefully, "perhaps you will do me a favour. It is only to take this black horse of mine to his stable and harness that grey trooper nag to the sledge instead, as I wish to go the round of the moat, and my beast is tired."

Again the men saluted and set to work to change the horses, whereon Lysbeth, guessing her cavalier's purpose, turned as though to fly away, for her skates were still upon her feet. But he was watching.

"Señora," he said in a quiet voice, "I think that you gave me the promise of your company for the rest of this evening, and I am certain," he added with a slight bow, "that you are a lady whom nothing would induce to tell an untruth. Had I not been sure of that I should scarcely have accepted your evidence so readily just now."

Lysbeth winced visibly. "I thought, Señor, that you were going to return to the fête."

"I do not remember saying so, Señora, and as a matter of fact I have pickets to visit. Do not be afraid, the drive is charming in this moonlight, and afterwards perhaps you will extend your hospitality so far as to ask me to supper at your house."

Still she hesitated, dismay written on her face.

"Jufvrouw Lysbeth," he said in an altered voice, "in my country we have a homely proverb which says, 'she who buys, pays.' You have bought and—the goods have been delivered. Do you understand? Ah! allow me to have the pleasure of arranging those furs. I knew that you were the soul of honour, and were but—shall we say teasing me? Otherwise, had you really wished to go, of course you would have skated away just now while you had the opportunity. That is why I gave it you, as naturally I should not desire to detain you against your will."

Lysbeth heard and was aghast, for this man's cleverness

overwhelmed her. At every step he contrived to put her in the wrong; moreover she was crushed by the sense that he had justice on his side. She *had* bought and she *must* pay. Why had she bought? Not for any advantage of her own, but from an impulse of human pity—to save a fellow creature's life. And why should she have perjured herself so deeply in order to save that life? She was a Catholic and had no sympathy with such people. Probably this person was an Anabaptist, one of that dreadful sect which practised nameless immoralities, and ran stripped through the streets crying that they were "the naked Truth." Was it then because the creature had declared that she had known her father in her childhood? To some extent yes, but was not there more behind? Had she not been influenced by the woman's invocation about the Spaniards, of which the true meaning came home to her during that dreadful sledge race; at the moment, indeed, when she saw the Satanic look upon the face of Montalvo? It seemed to her that this was so, though at the time she had not understood it; it seemed to her that she was not a free agent; that some force pushed her forward which she could neither control nor understand.

Moreover—and this was the worst of it—she felt that little good could come of her sacrifice, or that if good came, at least it would not be to her or hers. Now she was as a fish in a net, though why it was worth this brilliant Spaniard's while to snare her she could not understand, for she forgot that she was beautiful and a woman of property. Well, to save the blood of another she had bought, and in her own blood and happiness, or in that of those dear to her, assuredly she must pay, however cruel and unjust might be the price.

Such were the thoughts that passed through Lysbeth's mind as the strong Flemish gelding lumbered forward, dragging the sledge at the same steady pace over rough ice

and smooth. And all the while Montalvo behind her was chatting pleasantly about this matter and that; telling her of the orange groves in Spain, of the Court of the Emperor Charles, of adventures in the French wars, and many other things, to which conversation she made such answer as courtesy demanded and no more. What would Dirk think, she was wondering, and her cousin, Pieter van de Werff, whose good opinion she valued, and all the gossips of Leyden? She only prayed that they might not have missed her, or at least that they took it for granted that she had gone home.

On this point, however, she was soon destined to be undeceived, for presently, trudging over the snow-covered ice and carrying his useless skates in his hand, they met a young man whom she knew as Dirk's fellow apprentice. On seeing them he stopped in front of the sledge in such a position that the horse, a steady and a patient animal, pulled up of its own accord.

"Is the Jufvrouw Lysbeth van Hout there?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes," she replied, but before she could say more Montalvo broke in, inquiring what might be the matter.

"Nothing," he answered, "except that she was lost and Dirk van Goorl, my friend, sent me to look for her this way while he took the other."

"Indeed. Then, noble sir, perhaps you will find the Heer Dirk van Goorl and tell him that the Señora, his cousin, is merely enjoying an evening drive, and that if he comes to her house in an hour's time he will find her safe and sound, and with her myself, the Count Juan de Montalvo, whom she has honoured with an invitation to supper."

Then, before the astonished messenger could answer; before, indeed, Lysbeth could offer any explanation of his words, Montalvo lashed up the horse and left him stand-

ing on the moat bewildered, his cap off and scratching his head.

After this they proceeded on a journey which seemed to Lysbeth almost interminable. When the circuit of the walls was finished, Montalvo halted at one of the shut gates, and, calling to the guard within, summoned them to open. This caused delay and investigation, for at first the sergeant of the guard would not believe that it was his acting commandant who spoke without.

"Pardon, Excellency," he said when he had inspected him with a lantern, "but I did not think that you would be going the rounds with a lady in your sledge," and holding up the light the man took a long look at Lysbeth, grinning visibly as he recognised her.

"Ah, he is a gay bird, the captain, a very gay bird, and it's a pretty Dutch dickey he is teaching to pipe now," she heard him call to a comrade as he closed the heavy gates behind their sleigh.

Then followed more visits to other military posts in the town, and with each visit a further explanation. All this while the Count Montalvo uttered no word beyond those of ordinary compliment, and ventured on no act of familiarity; his conversation and demeanour indeed remaining perfectly courteous and respectful. So far as it went this was satisfactory, but at length there came a moment when Lysbeth felt that she could bear the position no longer.

"Señor," she said briefly, "take me home; I grow faint."

"With hunger doubtless," he interrupted; "well, by heaven! so do I. But, my dear lady, as you are aware, duty must be attended to, and, after all, you may have found some interest in accompanying me on a tour of the pickets at night. I know your people speak roughly of us Spanish soldiers, but I hope that after this you will be able to bear testimony to their discipline. Although it is a fête

day you will be my witness that we have not found a man off duty or the worse for drink. Here, you," he called to a soldier who stood up to salute him, "follow me to the house of the Jufvrouw Lysbeth van Hout, where I sup, and lead this sledge back to my quarters."

CHAPTER III

MONTALVO WINS A TRICK

TURNING up the Bree Straat, then as now perhaps the finest in the town of Leyden, Montalvo halted his horse before a substantial house fronted with three round-headed gables, of which the largest—that over the entrance in the middle—was shaped into two windows with balconies. This was Lysbeth's house which had been left to her by her father, where, until such time as she should please to marry, she dwelt with her aunt, Clara van Ziel. The soldier whom he had summoned having run to the horse's head, Montalvo leapt from his driver's seat to assist the lady to alight. At the moment Lysbeth was occupied with wild ideas of swift escape, but even if she could make up her mind to try it there was an obstacle which her thoughtful cavalier had foreseen.

"Jufvrouw van Hout," he said as he pulled up, "do you remember that you are still wearing skates?"

It was true, though in her agitation she had forgotten all about them, and the fact put sudden flight out of the question. She could not struggle into her own house walking on the sides of her feet like the tame seal which old fisherman Hans had brought from northern seas. It would be too ridiculous, and the servants would certainly tell the story all about the town. Better for a while longer to put up with the company of this odious Spaniard than to become a laughing stock in an attempt to fly. Besides, even if she found herself on the other side of it, could she shut the door in his face? Would her promise let her, and would he consent?

"Yes," she answered briefly, "I will call my servant."

Then for the first time the Count became complimentary in a dignified Spanish manner.

"Let no base-born menial hold the foot which it is an honour for an hidalgo of Spain to touch. I am your servant," he said, and resting one knee on the snow-covered step he waited.

Again there was nothing to be done, so Lysbeth must needs thrust out her foot from which very delicately and carefully he unstrapped the skate.

"What Jack can bear Jill must put up with," muttered Lysbeth to herself as she advanced the other foot. Just at that moment, however, the door behind them began to open.

"She who buys," murmured Montalvo as he commenced on the second set of straps. Then the door swung wide, and the voice of Dirk van Goorl was heard saying in a tone of relief:

"Yes, sure enough it is she, Tante Clara, and some one is taking off her boots."

"Skates, Señor, skates," interrupted Montalvo, glancing backward over his shoulder, then added in a whisper as he bent once more to his task, "ahem—*pays*. You will introduce me, is it not so? I think it will be less awkward for you."

So, as flight was impossible, for he held her by the foot, and an instinct told her that, especially to the man she loved, the only thing to do was to make light of the affair, Lysbeth said—

"Dirk, Cousin Dirk, I think you know—this is—the Honourable Captain the Count Juan de Montalvo."

"Ah! it is the Señor van Goorl," said Montalvo, pulling off the skate and rising from his knee, which, from his excess of courtesy, was now wet through. "Señor, allow me to

return to you, safe and sound, the fair lady of whom I have robbed you for a while."

"For a while, captain," blurted Dirk; "why, from first to last, she has been gone nearly four hours, and a fine state we have been in about her."

"That will all be explained presently, Señor—at supper, to which the Jufvrouw has been so courteous as to ask me," then, aside and below his breath, again the ominous word of reminder—"*pays*." "Most happily, your cousin's presence was the means of saving a fellow-creature's life. But, as I have said, the tale is long. Señora—permit," and in another second Lysbeth found herself walking down her own hall upon the arm of the Spaniard, while Dirk, her aunt, and some guests followed obediently behind.

Now Montalvo knew that his difficulties were over for that evening at any rate, since he had crossed the threshold and was a guest.

Half unconsciously Lysbeth guided him to the balconied *sit-kamer* on the first floor, which in our day would answer to the drawing-room. Here several other of her friends were gathered, for it had been arranged that the ice-festival should end with a supper as rich as the house could give. To these, too, she must introduce her cavalier, who bowed courteously to each in turn. Then she escaped, but, as she passed him, distinctly, she could swear, did she see his lips shape themselves to the hateful word—"*pays*."

When she reached her chamber, so great was Lysbeth's wrath and indignation that almost she choked with it, till again reason came to her aid, and with reason a desire to carry the thing off as well as might be. So she told her maid Greta to robe her in her best garment, and to hang about her neck the famous collar of pearls which her father had brought from the East, that was the talk and envy of half the women in Leyden. On her head, too, she

placed the cap of lovely lace which had been a wedding gift given to her mother by her grandmother, the old dame who wove it. Then she added such golden ornaments as it was customary for women of her class to wear, and descended to the gathering room.

Meanwhile Montalvo had not been idle. Taking Dirk aside, and pleading his travel-worn condition, he had prayed him to lead him to some room where he might order his dress and person. Dirk complied, though with an ill grace, but so pleasant did Montalvo make himself during those few minutes, that before he ushered him back to the company in some way Dirk found himself convinced that this particular Spaniard was not, as the saying went, "as black as his mustachios." He felt almost sure too, although he had not yet found time to tell him the details of it, that there was some excellent reason to account for his having carried off the adorable Lysbeth during an entire afternoon and evening.

It is true that there still remained the strange circumstance of the attempted foul of his cousin Van de Werff's sledge in the great race, but, after all, why should there not be some explanation of this also? It had happened, if it did happen, at quite a distance from the winning post, when there were few people to see what passed. Indeed, now that he came to think of it, the only real evidence on the matter was that of his cousin, the little girl passenger, since Van de Werff himself had brought no actual accusation against his opponent.

Shortly after they returned to the company it was announced that supper had been served, whereon ensued a pause. It was broken by Montalvo, who, stepping forward, offered his hand to Lysbeth, saying in a voice that all could hear:

"Lady, my companion of the race, permit the humblest representative of the greatest monarch in the world to have

an honour which doubtless that monarch would be glad to claim."

That settled the matter, for as the acting commandant of the Spanish garrison of Leyden had chosen to refer to his official position, it was impossible to question his right of precedence over a number of folk, who, although prominent in their way, were but unennobled Netherlander burghers.

Lysbeth, indeed, did find courage to point to a rather flurried and spasmodic lady with grey hair who was fanning herself as though the season were July, and wondering whether the cook would come up to the grand Spaniard's expectations, and to murmur "My aunt." But she got no further, for the Count instantly added in a low voice—

"Doubtless comes next in the direct line, but unless my education has been neglected, the heiress of the house who is of age goes before the collateral—however aged."

By this time they were through the door, so it was useless to argue the point further, and again Lysbeth felt herself overmatched and submitted. In another minute they had passed down the stairs, entered the dining hall, and were seated side by side at the head of the long table, of which the foot was occupied presently by Dirk van Goorl and her aunt, who was also his cousin, the widow Clara van Ziel.

There was a silence while the domestics began their service, of which Montalvo took opportunity to study the room, the table and the guests. It was a fine room panelled with German oak, and lighted sufficiently, if not brilliantly, by two hanging brass chandeliers of the famous Flemish workmanship, in each of which were fixed eighteen of the best candles, while on the sideboards were branch candlesticks, also of worked brass. The light thus provided was supplemented by that from the great fire of peat and old ships' timber which burned in a wide blue-



THEY PASSED DOWN THE STAIRS

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tiled fire-place, half way down the chamber, throwing its reflections upon many a flagon and bowl of cunningly hammered silver that adorned the table and the sideboards.

The company was of the same character as the furniture, handsome and solid; people of means, every man and woman of them, accumulated by themselves or their fathers, in the exercise of the honest and profitable trade whereof at this time the Netherlands had a practical monopoly.

"I have made no mistake," thought Montalvo to himself, as he surveyed the room and its occupants. "My little neighbour's necklace alone is worth more cash than ever I had the handling of, and the plate would add up handsomely. Well, before very long I hope to be in a position to make its inventory." Then, having first crossed himself devoutly, he fell to upon a supper that was well worth his attention, even in a land noted for the luxury of its food and wines and the superb appetites of those who consumed them.

It must not be supposed, however, that the gallant captain allowed eating to strangle conversation. On the contrary, finding that his hostess was in no talkative mood, he addressed himself to his fellow guests, chatting with them pleasantly upon every convenient subject. Among these guests was none other than Pieter van de Werff, his conqueror in that afternoon's contest, upon whose watchful and suspicious reserve he brought all his batteries to bear.

First he congratulated Pieter and lamented his own ill-luck, and this with great earnestness, for as a matter of fact he had lost much more money on the event than he could afford to pay. Then he praised the grey horse and asked if he was for sale, offering his own black in part exchange.

"A good nag," he said, "but one that I do not wish to conceal has his faults, which must be taken into consideration if it comes to the point of putting a price upon him.

For instance, Mynheer van de Werff, you may have noticed the dreadful position in which the brute put me towards the end of the race. There are certain things that this horse always shies at, and one of them is a red cloak. Now I don't know if you saw that a girl in a red cloak suddenly appeared on the bank. In an instant the beast was round and you may imagine what my feelings were, being in charge of your fair kinswoman, for I thought to a certainty that we should be over. What is more, it quite spoilt my chance of the race, for after he has shied like that, the black turns sulky, and won't let himself go."

When Lysbeth heard this amazing explanation, remembering the facts, she also gasped. And yet now that she came to think of it, a girl in a red cloak did appear near them at the moment, and the horse *did* whip round as though it had shied violently. Was it possible, she wondered, that the captain had not really intended to foul the Badger sledge?

Meanwhile Van de Werff was answering in his slow voice. Apparently he accepted Montalvo's explanation; at least he said that he, too, saw the red-cloaked girl, and was glad that nothing serious had come of the mischance. As regarded the proposed deal, he should be most happy to go into it upon the lines mentioned, as the grey, although a very good horse, was aged, and he thought the barb one of the most beautiful animals that he had ever seen. At this point, as he had not the slightest intention of parting with his valuable charger, at any rate on such terms, Montalvo changed the subject.

At length, when men, and, for the matter of that, women, too, had well eaten, and the beautiful tall Flemish glasses not for the first time were replenished with the best Rhenish or Spanish wines, Montalvo, taking advantage of a pause in the conversation, rose and said that he wished to claim the privilege of a stranger among them and to pro-

pose a toast, namely, the health of his late adversary, Pieter van de Werff.

At this the audience applauded, for they were all very proud of the young man's success, and some of them had won money over him. Still more did they applaud, being great judges of culinary matters, when the Spaniard began his speech by an eloquent tribute to the surpassing excellence of the supper. Rarely, he assured them, and especially did he assure the honourable widow Van Ziel (who blushed all over with pleasure at his compliments, and fanned herself with such vigour that she upset Dirk's wine over his new tunic, cut in the Brussels style), the fame of whose skill in such matters had travelled so far as The Hague, for he had heard of it there himself—rarely even in the Courts of Kings and Emperors, or at the tables of Popes and Archbishops, had he eaten food so exquisitely cooked, or drunk wines of a better vintage.

Then, passing on to the subject of his speech, Van de Werff, he toasted him and his horse and his little sister and his sledge, in really well-chosen and appropriate terms, not by any means overdoing it, for he confessed frankly that his defeat was a bitter disappointment to him, especially as every soldier in the camp had expected him to win and—he was afraid—backed him for more than they could afford. Also, incidentally, so that every one might be well acquainted with it, he retold the story of the girl with the red cloak. Next, suddenly dropping his voice and adopting a quieter manner, he addressed himself to the Aunt Clara and the "well-beloved Heer Dirk," saying that he owed them both an apology, which he must take this opportunity to make, for having detained the lady at his right during so unreasonable a time that afternoon. When, however, they had heard the facts they would, he was sure, blame him no longer, especially if he told them that this breach of good manners had been the means of saving a human life.

Immediately after the race, he explained, one of his sergeants had found him out to tell him that a woman, suspected of certain crimes against life and property and believed to be a notorious escaped witch or heretic, had been captured, asking for reasons which he need not trouble them with, that he would deal with the case at once. This woman also, so said the man, had been heard that very afternoon to make use of the most horrible, the most traitorous and blaspheming language to a lady of Leyden, the Jufvrouw Lysbeth van Hout, indeed; as was deposed by a certain spy named Black Meg, who had overheard the conversation.

Now, went on Montalvo, as he knew well, every man and woman in that room would share his horror of traitorous and blasphemous heretics—here most of the company crossed themselves, especially those who were already secret adherents of the New Religion. Still, even heretics had a right to a fair trial; at least he, who although a soldier by profession, was a man who honestly detested unnecessary bloodshed, held that opinion. Also long experience taught him great mistrust of the evidence of informers, who had a money interest in the conviction of the accused. Lastly, it did not seem well to him that the name of a young and noble lady should be mixed up in such a business. As they knew under the recent edicts, his powers in these cases were absolute; indeed, in his official capacity he was ordered at once to consign any suspected of Anabaptism or other forms of heresy to be dealt with by the appointed courts, and in the case of people who had escaped, to cause them, on satisfactory proof of their identity, to be executed instantly without any further trial. Under these circumstances, fearing that did the lady know his purpose she might take fright, he had, he confessed, resorted to artifice, as he was very anxious both for her sake and in the interest of justice that she should bear testimony in the matter.

So he asked her to accompany him on a short drive while he attended to a business affair; a request to which she had graciously assented.

"Friends," he went on in a still more solemn voice, "the rest of my story is short. Indeed do I congratulate myself on the decision that I took, for when confronted with the prisoner your young and honourable hostess was able upon oath to refute the story of the spy with the result that I in my turn was able to save an unfortunate, and, as I believe, a half-crazed creature from an immediate and a cruel death. Is it not so, lady?" and helpless in the net of circumstance, not knowing indeed what else to do, Lysbeth bowed her head in assent.

"I think," concluded Montalvo, "that after this explanation, what may have appeared to be a breach of manners will be forgiven. I have only one other word to add. My position is peculiar; I am an official here, and I speak boldly among friends taking the risk that any of you present will use what I say against me, which for my part I do not believe. Although there is no better Catholic and no truer Spaniard in the Netherlands, I have been accused of showing too great a sympathy with your people, and of dealing too leniently with those who have incurred the displeasure of our Holy Church. In the cause of right and justice I am willing to bear such aspersions; still this is a slanderous world, a world in which truth does not always prevail. Therefore, although I have told you nothing but the bare facts, I do suggest in the interests of your hostess—in my own humble interest who might be misrepresented, and I may add in the interest of every one present at this board—that it will perhaps be well that the details of the story which I have had the honour of telling you should not be spread about—that they should in fact find a grave within these walls. Friends, do you agree?"

Then moved by a common impulse, and by a common

if a secret fear, with the single exception of Lysbeth, every person present, yes, even the cautious and far-seeing young Van de Werff, echoed "We agree."

"Friends," said Montalvo, "those simple words carry to my mind conviction deep as any vow however solemn; deep, if that were possible, as did the oath of your hostess, upon the faith of which I felt myself justified in acquitting the poor creature who was alleged to be an escaped heretic." Then with a courteous and all-embracing bow Montalvo sat down.

"What a good man! What a delightful man!" murmured Aunt Clara to Dirk in the buzz of conversation which ensued.

"Yes, yes, cousin, but——"

"And what discrimination he has, what taste! Did you notice what he said about the cooking?"

"I heard something, but——"

"It is true that folk have told me that my capon stewed in milk, such as we had to-night— Why, lad, what is the matter with your doublet? You fidget me by continually rubbing at it."

"You have upset the red wine over it, that is all," answered Dirk, sulkily. "It is spoiled."

"And little loss either; to tell you the truth, Dirk, I never saw a coat worse cut. You young men should learn in the matter of clothes from the Spanish gentlemen. Look at his Excellency, the Count Montalvo, for instance——"

"See here, aunt," broke in Dirk with suppressed fury, "I think I have heard enough about Spaniards and the Captain Montalvo for one night. First of all he spirits off Lysbeth and is absent with her for four hours; then he invites himself to supper and places himself at the head of the table with her, setting me down to the dullest meal I ever ate at the other end——"

"Cousin Dirk," said Aunt Clara with dignity, "your temper has got the better of your manners. Certainly you might learn courtesy as well as dress, even from so humble a person as a Spanish hidalgo and commander." Then she rose from the table, adding—"Come, Lysbeth, if you are ready, let us leave these gentlemen to their wine."

After the ladies had gone the supper went on merrily. In those days, nearly everybody drank too much liquor, at any rate at feasts, and this company was no exception. Even Montalvo, his game being won and the strain on his nerves relaxed, partook pretty freely, and began to talk in proportion to his potations. Still, so clever was the man that in his cups he yet showed method, for his conversation revealed a sympathy with Netherlander grievances and a tolerance of view in religious matters rarely displayed by a Spaniard.

From such questions they drifted into a military discussion, and Montalvo, challenged by Van de Werff, who, as it happened, had not drunk too much wine, explained how, were he officer in command, he would defend Leyden from attack by an overwhelming force. Very soon Van de Werff saw that he was a capable soldier who had studied his profession, and being himself a capable civilian with a thirst for knowledge pressed the argument from point to point.

"And suppose," he asked at length, "that the city were starving and still untaken, so that its inhabitants must either fall into the hands of the enemy or burn the place over their heads, what would you do then?"

"Then, Mynheer, if I were a small man I should yield to the clamour of the starving folk and surrender——"

"And if you were a big man, captain?"

"If I were a big man—ah! if I were a big man, why then—I should cut the dykes and let the sea beat once more against the walls of Leyden. An army cannot live in salt water, Mynheer."

"That would drown out the farmers and ruin the land for twenty years."

"Quite so, Mynheer, but when the corn has to be saved, who thinks of spoiling the straw?"

"I follow you, Señor, your proverb is good, although I have never heard it."

"Many good things come from Spain, Mynheer, including this red wine. One more glass with you, for, if you will allow me to say it, you are a man worth meeting over a beaker—or a blade."

"I hope that you will always retain the same opinion of me," answered Van de Werff as he drank, "at the trencher or in the trenches."

Then Pieter went home, and before he slept that night made careful notes of all the Spaniard's suggested military dispositions, both of attackers and attacked, writing underneath them the proverb about the corn and the straw. There existed no real reason why he should have done so, as he was only a civilian engaged in business, but Pieter van de Werff chanced to be a provident young man who knew many things might happen which could not precisely be foreseen. As it fell out in after years, a time came when he was able to put Montalvo's advice to good use. All readers of the history of the Netherlands know how the Burgomaster Pieter van de Werff saved Leyden from the Spanish.

As for Dirk van Goorl, he sought his lodging rather tipsy, and arm-in-arm with none other than Captain the Count Don Juan de Montalvo.

CHAPTER IV

THREE WAKINGS

THERE were three persons in Leyden whose reflections when they awoke on the morning after the sledge race are not without interest, at any rate to the student of their history. First there was Dirk van Goorl, whose work made an early riser of him—to say nothing of a splitting headache which on this morning called him into consciousness just as the clock in the bell tower was chiming half-past four. Now there are few things more depressing than to be awakened by a bad headache at half-past four in the black frost of a winter dawn. Yet as Dirk lay and thought a conviction took hold of him that his depression was not due entirely to the headache or to the cold.

One by one he recalled the events of yesterday. First he had been late for his appointment with Lysbeth, which evidently vexed her. Then the Captain Montalvo had swooped down and carried her away, as a hawk bears off a chicken under the very eyes of the hen-wife, while he—donkey that he was—could find no words in which to protest. Next, thinking it his duty to back the sledge wherein Lysbeth rode, although it was driven by a Spaniard, he had lost ten florins on that event, which, being a thrifty young man, did not at all please him. The rest of the fête he had spent hunting for Lysbeth, who mysteriously vanished with the Spaniard, an unentertaining and even an anxious pastime. Then came the supper, when once more the Count swooped down on Lysbeth, leaving him to escort his Cousin Clara, whom he considered an old fool and disliked, and who, having spoilt his new jacket by

spilling wine over it, ended by abusing his taste in dress. Nor was that all—he had drunk a great deal more strong wine than was wise, for to this his head certified. Lastly he had walked home arm in arm with this lady-snatching Spaniard, and by Heaven! yes, he had sworn eternal friendship with him on the doorstep.

Well, there was no doubt that the Count was an uncommonly good fellow—for a Spaniard. As for that story of the foul he had explained it quite satisfactorily, and he had taken his beating like a gentleman. Could anything be nicer or in better feeling than his allusions to Cousin Pieter in his after-supper speech? Also, and this was a graver matter, the man had shown that he was tolerant and kindly by the way in which he dealt with the poor creature called the Mare, a woman whose history Dirk knew well; one whose sufferings had made of her a crazy and rash-tongued wanderer, who, so it was rumoured, could use a knife.

In fact, for the truth may as well be told at once, Dirk was a Lutheran, having been admitted to that community two years before. To be a Lutheran in those days, that is in the Netherlands, meant, it need scarcely be explained, that you walked the world with a halter round your neck and a vision of the rack and the stake before your eyes; circumstances under which religion became a more earnest and serious thing than most people find it in this century. Still even at that date the dreadful penalties attaching to the crime did not prevent many of the burgher and lower classes from worshipping God in their own fashion. Indeed, if the truth had been known, of those who were present at Lysbeth's supper on the previous night more than half, including Pieter van de Werff, were adherents of the New Faith.

To dismiss religious considerations, however, Dirk could have wished that this kindly natured Spaniard was not

quite so good-looking or quite so appreciative of the excellent points of the young Leyden ladies, and especially of Lysbeth's, with whose sterling character, he now remembered, Montalvo had assured him he was much impressed. What he feared was that this regard might be reciprocal. After all a Spanish hidalgo in command of the garrison was a distinguished person, and, alas! Lysbeth also was a Catholic. Dirk loved Lysbeth; he loved her with that patient sincerity which was characteristic of his race and his own temperament, but in addition to and above the reasons that have been given already it was this fact of the difference of religion which hitherto had built a wall between them. Of course she was unaware of anything of the sort. She did not know even that he belonged to the New Faith, and without the permission of the elders of his sect, he would not dare to tell her, for the lives of men and of their families could not be confided lightly to the hazard of a girl's discretion.

Herein lay the real reason why, although Dirk was so devoted to Lysbeth, and although he imagined that she was not indifferent to him, as yet no word had passed between them of love or marriage. How could he who was a Lutheran ask a Catholic to become his wife without telling her the truth? And if he told her the truth, and she consented to take the risk, how could he drag her into that dreadful net? Supposing even that she kept to her own faith, which of course she would be at liberty to do, although equally, of course, he was bound to try to convert her, their children, if they had any, must be brought up in his beliefs. Then, sooner or later, might come the informer, that dreadful informer whose shadow already lay heavy upon thousands of homes in the Netherlands, and after the informer the officer, and after the officer the priest, and after the priest the judge, and after the judge—the executioner and the stake.

In this case, what would happen to Lysbeth? She might prove herself innocent of the horrible crime of heresy, if by that time she was innocent, but what would life become to the loving young woman whose husband and children, perhaps, had been haled off to the slaughter chambers of the Papal Inquisition? This was the true first cause why Dirk had remained silent, even when he was sorely tempted to speak; yes, although his instinct told him that his silence had been misinterpreted and set down to overcaution, or indifference, or to unnecessary scruples.

The next to wake up that morning was Lysbeth, who, if she was not troubled with headache resulting from indulgence—and in that day women of her class sometimes suffered from it—had pains of her own to overcome. When sifted and classified these pains resolved themselves into a sense of fiery indignation against Dirk van Goorl. Dirk had been late for his appointment, alleging some ridiculous excuse about the cooling of a bell, as though she cared whether the bell were hot or cold, with the result that she had been thrown into the company of that dreadful Martha the Mare. After the Mare—aggravated by Black Meg—came the Spaniard. Here again Dirk had shown contemptible indifference and insufficiency, for he allowed her to be forced into the Wolf sledge against her will. Nay, he had actually consented to the thing. Next, in a fateful sequence followed all the other incidents of that hideous carnival; the race, the foul, if it was a foul; the dreadful nightmare vision called into her mind by the look upon Montalvo's face; the trial of the Mare, her own unpremeditated but indelible perjury; the lonely drive with the man who compelled her to it; the exhibition of herself before all the world as his willing companion; and the feast in which he appeared as her cavalier, and was accepted of the simple company almost as an angel entertained by chance.

What did he mean? Doubtless, for on that point she could scarcely be mistaken, he meant to make love to her, for had he not in practice said as much? And now—this was the terrible thing—she was in his power, since if he chose to do so, without doubt he could prove that she had sworn a false oath for her own purposes. Also that lie weighed upon her mind, although it had been spoken in a good cause; if it was good to save a wretched fanatic from the fate which, were the truth known, without doubt her crime deserved.

Of course, the Spaniard was a bad man, if an attractive one, and he had behaved wickedly, if with grace and breeding; but who expected anything else from a Spaniard, who only acted after his kind and for his own ends? It was Dirk—Dirk—that was to blame, not so much—and here again came the rub—for his awkwardness and mistakes of yesterday, as for his general conduct. Why had he not spoken to her before, and put her beyond the reach of such accidents as these to which a woman of her position and substance must necessarily be exposed? The saints knew that she had given him opportunity enough. She had gone as far as a maiden might, and not for all the Dirks on earth would she go one inch further. Why had she ever come to care for his foolish face? Why had she refused So-and-so, and So-and-so and So-and-so—all of them honourable men—with the result that now no other bachelor ever came near her, comprehending that she was under bond to her cousin? In the past she had persuaded herself that it was because of something she felt but could not see, of a hidden nobility of character which after all was not very evident upon the surface, that she loved Dirk van Goorl. But where was this something, this nobility? Surely a man who was a man ought to play his part, and not leave her in this false position, especially as there could be no question of means. She would

not have come to him empty-handed, very far from it, indeed. Oh ! were it not for the unlucky fact that she still happened to care about him—to her sorrow—never, never would she speak to him again.

The last of our three friends to awake on this particular morning, between nine and ten o'clock, indeed, when Dirk had been already two hours at his factory, and Lysbeth was buying provisions in the market place, was that accomplished and excellent officer, Captain the Count Juan de Montalvo. For a few seconds after his dark eyes opened he stared at the ceiling collecting his thoughts. Then, sitting up in bed, he burst into a prolonged roar of laughter. Really the whole thing was too funny for any man of humour to contemplate without being moved to merriment. That gaby, Dirk van Goorl ; the furiously indignant but helpless Lysbeth ; the solemn, fat-headed fools of Netherlanders at the supper, and the fashion in which he had played his own tune on the whole pack of them as though they were the strings of a fiddle—oh ! it was delicious.

As the reader by this time may have guessed, Montalvo was not the typical Spaniard of romance, and, indeed, of history. He was not gloomy and stern ; he was not even particularly vengeful or bloodthirsty. On the contrary, he was a clever and utterly unprincipled man with a sense of humour and a gift of *bonhomie* which made him popular in all places. Moreover, he was brave, a good soldier ; in a certain sense sympathetic, and, strange to say, no bigot. Indeed, which seems to have been a rare thing in those days, his religious views were so enlarged that he had none at all. His conduct, therefore, if from time to time it was affected by passing spasms of acute superstition, was totally uninfluenced by any settled spiritual hopes or fears, a condition which, he found, gave him great advantages in life. In fact, had it suited his purpose, Montalvo was prepared, at a moment's notice, to become Lutheran or Cal-

vinist, or Mahomedan, or Mystic, or even Anabaptist; on the principle, he would explain, that it is easy for the artist to paint any picture he likes upon a blank canvas.

And yet this curious pliancy of mind, this lack of conviction, this absolute want of moral sense, which ought to have given the Count such great advantages in his conflict with the world, were, in reality, the main source of his weakness. Fortune had made a soldier of the man, and he filled the part as he would have filled any part. But nature intended him for a play-actor, and from day to day he posed and mimed and mouthed through life in this character or in that, though never in his own character, principally because he had none. Still, far down in Montalvo's being there was something solid and genuine, and that something not good but bad. It was very rarely on view; the hand of circumstance must plunge deep to find it, but it dwelt there; the strong, cruel Spanish spirit which would sacrifice anything to save, or even to advance, itself. It was this spirit that Lysbeth had seen looking out of his eyes on the yesterday, which, when he knew that the race was lost, had prompted him to try to kill his adversary, although he killed himself and her in the attempt. Nor did she see it then for the last time, for twice more at least in her life she was destined to meet and tremble at its power.

In short, although Montalvo was a man who really disliked cruelty, he could upon occasion be cruel to the last degree; although he appreciated friends, and desired to have them, he could be the foulest of traitors. Although without a cause he would do no hurt to a living thing, yet if that cause were sufficient he would cheerfully consign a whole cityful to death. No, not cheerfully, he would have regretted their end very much, and often afterwards might have thought of it with sympathy and even sorrow. This was where he differed from the majority of his coun-

trymen in that age, who would have done the same thing, and more brutally, from honest principle, and for the rest of their lives rejoiced at the memory of the deed.

Montalvo had his ruling passion ; it was not war, it was not women ; it was money. But here again he did not care about the money for itself, since he was no miser, and being the most inveterate of gamblers never saved a single stiver. He wanted it to spend and to stake upon the dice. Thus again, in variance to the taste of most of his countrymen, he cared little for the other sex ; he did not even like their society, and as for their passion and the rest he thought it something of a bore. But he did care intensely for their admiration, so much so that if no better game were at hand, he would take enormous trouble to fascinate even a serving maid or a fish girl. Wherever he went it was his ambition to be reported the man the most admired of the fair in that city, and to attain this end he offered himself upon the altar of numerous love affairs which did not amuse him in the least. Of course, the indulgence of this vanity meant expense, since the fair require money and presents, and he who pursues them should be well dressed and horsed and able to do things in the very finest style. Also their relatives must be entertained, and when they were entertained impressed with the sense that they had the honour to be guests of a grandee of Spain.

Now that of a grandee has never been a cheap profession ; indeed, as many a pauper peer knows to-day, rank without resources is a terrific burden. Montalvo had the rank, for he was a well-born man, whose sole heritage was an ancient tower built by some warlike ancestor in a position admirably suited to the purpose of the said ancestor, namely, the pillage of travellers through a neighbouring mountain pass. When, however, travellers ceased to use that pass, or for other reasons robbery became no longer productive, the revenues of the Montalvo family declined

till at the present date they were practically nil. Thus it came about that the status of the last representative of this ancient stock was that of a soldier of fortune of the common type, endowed, unfortunately for himself, with grand ideas, a gambler's fatal fire, expensive tastes, and more than the usual pride of race.

Although, perhaps, he had never defined them very clearly, even to himself, Juan de Montalvo had two aims in life : first to indulge his every freak and fancy to the full, and next—but this was secondary and somewhat nebulous —to re-establish the fortunes of his family. In themselves they were quite legitimate aims, and in those times, when fishers of troubled waters generally caught something, and when men of ability and character might force their way to splendid positions, there was no reason why they should not have led him to success. Yet so far, at any rate, in spite of many opportunities, he had not succeeded although he was now a man of more than thirty. The causes of his failure were various, but at the bottom of them lay his lack of stability and genuineness.

A man who is always playing a part amuses every one but convinces nobody. Montalvo convinced nobody. When he discoursed on the mysteries of religion with priests, even priests who in those days for the most part were stupid, felt that they assisted in a mere intellectual exercise. When his theme was war his audience guessed that his object was probably love. When love was his song an inconvenient instinct was apt to assure the lady immediately concerned that it was love of self and not of her. They were all more or less mistaken, but, as usual, the women went nearest to the mark. Montalvo's real aim was self, but he spelt it, Money. Money in large sums was what he wanted, and what in this way or that he meant to win.

Now even in the sixteenth century fortunes did not lie

to the hand of every adventurer. Military pay was small, and not easily recoverable; loot was hard to come by, and quickly spent. Even the ransom of a rich prisoner or two soon disappeared in the payment of such debts of honour as could not be avoided. Of course there remained the possibility of wealthy marriage, which in a country like the Netherlands, that was full of rich heiresses, was not difficult to a high-born, handsome, and agreeable man of the ruling Spanish caste. Indeed, after many chances and changes the time had come at length when Montalvo must either marry or be ruined. For his station his debts, especially his gaming debts, were enormous, and creditors met him at every turn. Unfortunately for him, also, some of these creditors were persons who had the ear of people in authority. So at last it came about that an intimation reached him that this scandal must be abated, or he must go back to Spain, a country which, as it happened, he did not in the least wish to visit. In short, the sorry hour of reckoning, that hour which overtakes all procrastinators, had arrived, and marriage, wealthy marriage, was the only way wherewith it could be defied. It was a sad alternative to a man who for his own very excellent reasons did not wish to marry, but this had to be faced.

Thus it came about that, as the only suitable *partie* in Leyden, the Count Montalvo had sought out the well-favoured and well-endowed Jufvrouw Lysbeth van Hout to be his companion in the great sledge race, and taken so much trouble to ensure to himself a friendly reception at her house.

So far, things went well, and, what was more, the opening of the chase had proved distinctly entertaining. Also, the society of the place, after his appropriation of her at a public festival and their long moonlight *tête-à-tête*, which by now must be common gossip's talk, would be quite prepared for any amount of attention which he might see fit

to pay to Lysbeth. Indeed, why should he not pay attention to an unaffianced woman whose rank was lower if her means were greater than his own? Of course, he knew that her name had been coupled with that of Dirk van Goorl. He was perfectly aware also that these two young people were attached to each other, for as they walked home together on the previous night Dirk, possibly for motives of his own, had favoured him with a semi-intoxicated confidence to that effect. But as they were not affianced what did that matter? Indeed, had they been affianced, what would it matter? Still, Dirk van Goorl was an obstacle, and, therefore, although he seemed to be a good fellow, and he was sorry for him, Dirk van Goorl must be got out of the way, since he was convinced that Lysbeth was one of those stubborn-natured creatures who would probably decline to marry himself until this young Leyden lout had vanished. And yet he did not wish to be mixed up with duels, if for no other reason because in a duel the unexpected may always happen, and that would be a poor end. Certainly also he did not wish to be mixed up with murder; first, because he intensely disliked the idea of killing anybody, unless he was driven to it; and secondly, because murder has a nasty way of coming out. One could never be quite sure in what light the despatching of a young Netherlander of respectable family and fortune would be looked at by those in authority.

Also, there was another thing to be considered. If this young man died it was impossible to know exactly how Lysbeth would take his death. Thus she might elect to refuse to marry or decide to mourn him for four or five years, which for all practical purposes would be just as bad. And yet while Dirk lived how could he possibly persuade her to transfer her affections to himself? It seemed, therefore, that Dirk ought to decease. For quite a quarter of an hour Montalvo thought the matter over, and then, just

as he had given it up and determined to leave things to chance, for a while at least, inspiration came, a splendid, a heaven-sent inspiration.

Dirk must not die, Dirk must live, but his continued existence must be the price of the hand of Lysbeth van Hout. If she was half as fond of the man as he believed, it was probable that she would be delighted to marry anybody else in order to save his precious neck, for that was just the kind of sentimental idiotcy of which nine women out of ten really enjoyed the indulgence. Moreover, this scheme had other merits; it did every one a good turn. Dirk would be saved from extinction for which he should be grateful: Lysbeth, besides earning the honour of an alliance, perhaps only temporary, with himself, would be able to go through life wrapped in a heavenly glow of virtue arising from the impression that she had really done something very fine and tragic, while he, Montalvo, under Providence, the humble purveyor of these blessings, would also benefit to some small extent.

The difficulty was: How could the situation be created? How could the interesting Dirk be brought to a pass that would give the lady an opportunity of exercising her finer feelings on his behalf? If only he were a heretic now! Well, by the Pope why shouldn't he be a heretic? If ever a fellow had the heretical cut this fellow had; flat-faced, sanctimonious-looking, and with a fancy for dark-coloured stockings—he had observed that all heretics, male and female, wore dark-coloured stockings, perhaps by way of mortifying the flesh. He could think of only one thing against it, the young man had drunk too much last night. But there were certain breeds of heretics who did not mind drinking too much. Also the best would slip sometimes, for, as he had learned from the old Castilian priest who taught him Latin, *humanum est*, etc.

This, then, was the summary of his reflections. (1) That

to save the situation, within three months or so he must be united in holy matrimony with Lysbeth van Hout. (2) That if it proved impossible to remove the young man, Dirk van Goorl, from his path by overmatching him in the lady's affections, or by playing on her jealousy (Query: Could a woman be egged into becoming jealous of that flounder of a fellow and into marrying some one else out of pique?), stronger measures must be adopted. (3) That such stronger measures should consist of inducing the lady to save her lover from death by uniting herself in marriage with one who for her sake would do violence to his conscience and manipulate the business. (4) That this plan would be best put into execution by proving the lover to be a heretic, but if unhappily this could not be proved because he was not, still he must figure in that capacity for this occasion only. (5) That meanwhile it would be well to cultivate the society of Mynheer van Goorl as much as possible, first because he was a person with whom, under the circumstances, he, Montalvo, would naturally wish to become intimate, and secondly, because he was quite certain to be an individual with cash to lend.

Now, these researches after heretics invariably cost money, for they involved the services of spies. Obviously, therefore, friend Dirk, the Dutch Flounder, was a man to provide the butter in which he was going to be fried. Why, if any Hollander had a spark of humour he would see the joke of it himself—and Montalvo ended his reflections as he had begun them, with a merry peal of laughter, after which he rose and ate a most excellent breakfast.

It was about half-past five o'clock that afternoon before the Captain and Acting-Commandant Montalvo returned from some duty to which he had been attending, for it may be explained that he was a zealous officer and a master of detail. As he entered his lodgings the soldier who acted

as his servant, a man selected for silence and discretion, saluted and stood at attention.

"Is the woman here?" he asked.

"Excellency, she is here, though I had difficulty enough in persuading her to come, for I found her in bed and out of humour."

"Peace to your difficulties. Where is she?"

"In the small inner room, Excellency."

"Good, then see that no one disturbs us, and—stay, when she goes out follow her and note her movements till you trace her home."

The man saluted, and Montalvo passed upstairs into the inner room, carefully shutting both doors behind him. The place was unlighted, but through the large stone-mullioned window the rays of the full moon poured brightly, and by them, seated in a straight-backed chair, Montalvo saw a draped form. There was something forbidding, something almost unnatural, in the aspect of this sombre form perched thus upon a chair in expectant silence. It reminded him—for he had a touch of inconvenient imagination—of an evil bird squatted upon the bough of a dead tree awaiting the dawn that it might go forth to devour some appointed prey.

"Is that you, Mother Meg?" he asked in tones from which most of the jocosity had vanished. "Quite like old times at The Hague—isn't it?"

The moonlit figure turned its head, for he could see the light shine upon the whites of the eyes.

"Who else, Excellency," said a voice hoarse and thick with rheum, a voice like the croak of a crow, "though it is little thanks to your Excellency. Those must be strong who can bathe in Rhine water through a hole in the ice and take no hurt."

"Don't scold, woman," he answered, "I have no time for it. If you were ducked yesterday, it served you right

for losing your cursed temper. Could you not see that I had my own game to play, and you were spoiling it? Must I be flouted before my men, and listen while you warn a lady with whom I wish to stand well against me?"

"You generally have a game to play, Excellency, but when it ends in my being first robbed and then nearly drowned beneath the ice—well, that is a game which Black Meg does not forget."

"Hush, mother, you are not the only person with a memory. What was the reward? Twelve florins? Well, you shall have them, and five more; that's good pay for a lick of cold water. Are you satisfied?"

"No, Excellency. I wanted the life, that heretic's life. I wanted to baste her while she burned, or to tread her down while she was buried. I have a grudge against the woman because I know, yes, because I know," she repeated fiercely, "that if I do not kill her she will try to kill me. Her husband and her young son were burnt, upon my evidence mostly, but this is the third time she has escaped me."

"Patience, mother, patience, and I dare say that everything will come right in the end. You have bagged two of the family—Papa heretic and Young Hopeful. Really you should not grumble if the third takes a little hunting, or wonder that in the meanwhile you are not popular with Mama. Now, listen. You know the young woman whom it was necessary that I should humour yesterday. She is rich, is she not?"

"Yes, I know her, and I knew her father. He left her house, furniture, jewellery, and thirty thousand crowns, which are placed out at good interest. A nice fortune for a gallant who wants money, but it will be Dirk van Goorl's, not yours."

"Ah! that is just the point. Now what do you know about Dirk van Goorl?"

"A respectable, hard-working burgher, son of well-to-do parents, brass-workers, who live at Alkmaar. Honest, but not very clever; the kind of man who grows rich, becomes a Burgomaster, founds a hospital for the poor, and has a fine monument put up to his memory."

"Mother, the cold water has dulled your wits. When I ask you about a man I want to learn what you know *against* him."

"Naturally, Excellency, naturally, but against this one I can tell you nothing. He has no lovers, he does not gamble, he does not drink except a glass after dinner. He works in his factory all day, goes to bed early, rises early, and calls on the Jufvrouw van Hout on Sundays; that is all."

"Where does he attend Mass?"

"At the Groote Kerke once a week, but he does not take the Sacrament or go to confession."

"That sounds bad, mother, very bad. You don't mean to say that he is a heretic?"

"Probably he is, Excellency; most of them are about here."

"Dear me, how very shocking. Do you know, I should not like that excellent young woman, a good Catholic too, like you and me, mother, to become mixed up with one of these dreadful heretics, who might expose her to all sorts of dangers. For, mother, who can touch pitch and not be defiled?"

"You waste time, Excellency," replied his visitor with a snort. "What do you want?"

"Well, in the interests of this young lady, I want to prove that this man *is* a heretic, and it has struck me that —as one accustomed to this sort of thing—you might be able to find the evidence."

"Indeed, Excellency, and has it struck you what my face would look like after I had thrust my head into a



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wasp's nest for your amusement? Do you know what it means to me if I go peering about among the heretics of Leyden? Well, I will tell you; it means that I should be killed. They are a strong lot, and a determined lot, and so long as you leave them alone they will leave you alone, but if you interfere with them, why then it is good night. Oh! yes, I know all about the law and the priests and the edicts and the Emperor. But the Emperor cannot burn a whole people, and though I hate them, I tell you," she added, standing up suddenly and speaking in a fierce, convinced voice, "that in the end the law and the edicts and the priests will get the worst of this fight. Yes, these Hollanders will beat them all and cut the throats of you Spaniards, and thrust those of you who are left alive out of their country, and spit upon your memories and worship God in their own fashion, and be proud and free, when you are dogs gnawing the bones of your greatness; dogs kicked back into your kennels to rot there. Those are not my own words," said Meg in a changed voice as she sat down again. "They are the words of that devil, Martha the Mare, which she spoke in my hearing when we had her on the rack, but somehow I think that they will come true, and that is why I always remember them."

"Indeed, her ladyship the Mare is a more interesting person than I thought, though if she can talk like that, perhaps, after all, it would have been as well to drown her. And now, dropping prophecy and leaving posterity to arrange for itself, let us come to business. How much? For evidence which would suffice to procure his conviction, mind."

"Five hundred florins, not a stiver less, so, Excellency, you need not waste your time trying to beat me down. You want good evidence, evidence on which the Council, or whoever they may appoint, will convict, and that means the unshaken testimony of two witnesses. Well, I tell you,

it isn't easy to come by ; there is great danger to the honest folk who seek it, for these heretics are desperate people, and if they find a spy while they are engaged in devil-worship at one of their conventicles, why—they kill him."

"I know all that, mother. What are you trying to cover up that you are so talkative? It isn't your usual way of doing business. Well, it is a bargain—you shall have your money when you produce the evidence. And now really if we stop here much longer people will begin to make remarks, for who shall escape aspersion in this censorious world? So good-night, mother, good-night," and he turned to leave the room.

"No, Excellency," she croaked with a snort of indignation, "no pay, no play ; I don't work on the faith of your Excellency's word alone."

"How much?" he asked again.

"A hundred florins down."

Then for a while they wrangled hideously, their heads held close together in the patch of moonlight, and so loathsome did their faces look, so plainly was the wicked purpose of their hearts written upon them, that in that faint luminous glow they might have been mistaken for emissaries from the under-world chaffering over the price of a human soul. At last the bargain was struck for fifty florins, and having received it into her hand Black Meg departed.

"Sixty-seven in all," she muttered to herself as she regained the street. "Well, it was no use holding out for any more, for he hasn't got the cash. The man's as poor as Lazarus, but he wants to live like Dives, and, what is more, he gambles, as I learned at The Hague. Also, there's something queer about his past ; I have heard as much as that. It must be looked into, and perhaps the bundle of papers which I helped myself to out of his desk while I was waiting"—and she touched the bosom of her

dress to make sure that they were safe—"may tell me a thing or two, though likely enough they are only unpaid bills. Ah! most noble cheat and captain, before you have done with her you may find that Black Meg knows how to pay back hot water for cold!"

CHAPTER V

THE DREAM OF DIRK

On the day following Montalvo's interview with Black Meg Dirk received a message from that gentleman, sent to his lodging by an orderly, which reminded him that he had promised to dine with him this very night. Now he had no recollection of any such engagement. Remembering with shame, however, that there were various incidents of the evening of the supper whereof his memory was most imperfect, he concluded that this must be one of them. So much against his own wishes Dirk sent back an answer to say that he would appear at the time and place appointed.

This was the third thing that had happened to annoy him that day. First he had met Pieter van de Werff, who informed him that all Leyden was talking about Lysbeth and the Captain Montalvo, to whom she was said to have taken a great fancy. Next when he went to call at the house in the Bree Straat he was told that both Lysbeth and his cousin Clara had gone out sleighing, which he did not believe, for as a thaw had set in the snow was no longer in a condition suitable to that amusement. Moreover, he could almost have sworn that, as he crossed the street, he caught sight of Cousin Clara's red face peeping at him from between the curtains of the upstairs sitting-room. Indeed he said as much to Greta, who, contrary to custom, had opened the door to him.

"I am sorry if Mynheer sees visions," answered that young woman imperturbably. "I told Mynheer that the ladies had gone out sleighing."

"I know you did, Greta; but why should they go out sleighing in a wet thaw?"

"I don't know, Mynheer. Ladies do those things that please them. It is not my place to ask their reasons."

Dirk looked at Greta, and was convinced that she was lying. He put his hand in his pocket, to find to his disgust that he had forgotten his purse. Then he thought of giving her a kiss and trying to melt the truth out of her in this fashion, but remembering that if he did, she might tell Lysbeth, which would make matters worse than ever, refrained. So the end of it was that he merely said "Oh! indeed," and went away.

"Great soft-head," reflected Greta, as she watched his retreating form, "he knew I was telling lies, why didn't he push past me, or—do anything. Ah! Mynheer Dirk, if you are not careful that Spaniard will take your wind. Well, he is more amusing, that's certain. I am tired of these duck-footed Leydeners, who daren't wink at a donkey lest he should bray, and among such holy folk somebody a little wicked is rather a change." Then Greta, who, it may be remembered, came from Brussels, and had French blood in her veins, went upstairs to make a report to her mistress, telling her all that passed.

"I did not ask you to speak falsehoods as to my being out sleighing and the rest. I told you to answer that I was not at home, and mind you say the same to the Captain Montalvo if he calls," said Lysbeth with some acerbity as she dismissed her.

In truth she was very sore and angry, and yet ashamed of herself because it was so. But things had gone so horribly wrong, and as for Dirk, he was the most exasperating person in the world. It was owing to his bad management and lack of readiness that her name was coupled with Montalvo's at every table in Leyden. And now what did she hear in a note from the Captain himself, sent to make

excuses for not having called upon her after the supper party, but that Dirk was going to dine with him that night? Very well, let him do it; she would know how to pay him back, and if necessary was ready to act up to any situation which he had chosen to create.

Thus thought Lysbeth, stamping her foot with vexation, but all the time her heart was sore. All the time she knew well enough that she loved Dirk, and, however strange might be his backwardness in speaking out his mind, that he loved her. And yet she felt as though a river was running between them. In the beginning it had been a streamlet, but now it was growing to a torrent. Worse still the Spaniard was upon her bank of the river.

After he had to some extent conquered his shyness and irritation Dirk became aware that he was really enjoying his dinner at Montalvo's quarters. There were three guests besides himself, two Spanish officers and a young Netherlander of his own class and age, Brant by name. He was the only son of a noted and very wealthy goldsmith at The Hague, who had sent him to study certain mysteries of the metal worker's art under a Leyden jeweller famous for the exquisite beauty of his designs. The dinner and the service were both of them perfect in style, but better than either proved the conversation, which was of a character that Dirk had never heard at the tables of his own class and people. Not that there was anything even broad about it, as might perhaps have been expected. No, it was the talk of highly accomplished and travelled men of the world, who had seen much and been actors in many moving events; men who were not overtrammelled by prejudices, religious or other, and who were above all things desirous of making themselves agreeable and instructive to the stranger within their gates. The Heer Brant also, who had but just arrived in Leyden, showed himself an able

and polished man, one that had been educated more thoroughly than was usual among his class, and who, at the table of his father, the opulent Burgomaster of The Hague, from his youth had associated with all classes and conditions of men. Indeed it was there that he made the acquaintance of Montalvo, who recognising him in the street had asked him to dinner.

After the dishes were cleared, one of the Spanish officers rose and begged to be excused, pleading some military duty. When he had saluted his commandant and gone, Montalvo suggested that they should play a game of cards. This was an invitation which Dirk would have liked to decline, but when it came to the point he did not, for fear of seeming peculiar in the eyes of these brilliant men of the world.

So they began to play, and as the game was simple very soon he picked up the points of it, and what is more, found them amusing. At first the stakes were not high, but they doubled themselves in some automatic fashion, till Dirk was astonished to find that he was gambling for considerable sums and winning them. Towards the last his luck changed a little, but when the game came to an end he found himself the richer by about three hundred and fifty florins.

"What am I to do with this?" he asked colouring up, as with sighs, which in one instance were genuine enough, the losers pushed the money across to him.

"Do with it?" laughed Montalvo, "did anybody ever hear such an innocent! Why, buy your lady-love, or somebody else's lady-love, a present. No, I'll tell you a better use than this, you give us to-morrow night at your lodging the best dinner that Leyden can produce, and a chance of winning some of this coin back again. Is it agreed?"

"If the other gentlemen wish it," said Dirk, modestly,

"though my apartment is but a poor place for such company."

"Of course we wish it," replied the three as with one voice, and the hour for meeting having been fixed they parted, the Heer Brant walking with Dirk to the door of his lodging.

"I was going to call on you to-morrow," he said, "to bring to you a letter of introduction from my father, though that should scarcely be needed as, in fact, we are cousins—second cousins only, our mothers having been first cousins."

"Oh! yes, Brant of The Hague, of whom my mother used to speak, saying that they were kinsmen to be proud of, although she had met them but little. Well, welcome, cousin; I trust that we shall be friends."

"I am sure of it," answered Brant, and putting his arm through Dirk's he pressed it in a peculiar fashion that caused him to start and look round. "Hush!" muttered Brant, "not here," and they began to talk of their late companions and the game of cards which they had played, an amusement as to the propriety of which Dirk intimated that he had doubts.

Young Brant shrugged his shoulders. "Cousin," he said, "we live in the world, so it is as well to understand the world. If the risking of a few pieces at play, which it will not ruin us to lose, helps us to understand it, well, for my part I am ready to risk them, especially as it puts us on good terms with those who, as things are, it is wise we should cultivate. Only, cousin, if I may venture to say it, be careful not to take more wine than you can carry with discretion. Better lose a thousand florins than let drop one word that you cannot remember."

"I know, I know," answered Dirk, thinking of Lysbeth's supper, and at the door of his lodgings they parted.

Like most Netherlanders, when Dirk made up his mind to do anything he did it thoroughly. Thus, having under-

taken to give a dinner party, he determined to give a good dinner. In ordinary circumstances his first idea would have been to consult his cousins, Clara and Lysbeth. After that monstrous story about the sleighing, however, which by inquiry from the coachman of the house, whom he happened to meet, he ascertained to be perfectly false, this, for the young man had some pride, he did not feel inclined to do. So in place of it he talked first to his landlady, a worthy dame, and by her advice afterwards with the first innkeeper of Leyden, a man of resource and experience. The innkeeper, well knowing that this customer would pay for anything which he ordered, threw himself into the affair heartily, with the result that by five o'clock relays of cooks and other attendants were to be seen streaming up Dirk's staircase, carrying every variety of dish that could be supposed to tempt the appetite of high-class cavaliers.

Dirk's apartment consisted of two rooms situated upon the first floor of an old house in a street that had ceased to be fashionable. Once, however, it had been a fine house, and, according to the ideas of the time, the rooms themselves were fine, especially the sitting chamber, which was oak-panelled, low, and spacious, with a handsome fireplace carrying the arms of its builder. Out of it opened his sleeping room—which had no other doorway—likewise oak-panelled, with tall cupboards built into the wall, and a magnificent carved bedstead, not unlike the canopy of a tomb in shape and general appearance.

The hour came, and with it the guests. The feast began, the cooks streamed up and down bearing relays of dishes from the inn. Above the table hung a six-armed brass chandelier, and in each of its sockets guttered a tallow candle furnishing light to the company beneath, although outside of its bright ring there was shadow more or less dense. Towards the end of dinner a portion of the rush wick of one of these candles fell into the brass saucer be-

neath, causing the molten grease to burn up fiercely. As it chanced, by the light of this sudden flare, Montalvo, who was sitting opposite to the door, thought that he caught sight of a tall, dark figure gliding along the wall towards the bedroom. For one instant he saw it, then it was gone.

"*Caramba,* my friend," he said, addressing Dirk, whose back was turned towards the figure, "have you any ghosts in this gloomy old room of yours? Because, if so, I think I have just seen one."

"Ghosts!" answered Dirk, "no, I never heard of any; I do not believe in ghosts. Take some more of that pasty."

Montalvo took some more pasty, and washed it down with a glass of wine. But he said no more about ghosts—perhaps an explanation of the phenomenon had occurred to him; at any rate he decided to leave the subject alone.

After the dinner they gambled, and this evening the stakes began where those of the previous night left off. For the first hour Dirk lost, then the luck turned and he won heavily, but always from Montalvo.

"My friend," said the captain at last, throwing down his cards, "certainly you are fated to be unfortunate in your matrimonial adventures, for the devil lives in your dice-box, and his highness does not give everything. I pass," and he rose from the table.

"I pass also," said Dirk following him into the window place, for he wished to take no more money. "You have been very unlucky, Count," he said.

"Very, indeed, my young friend," answered Montalvo, yawning, "in fact, for the next six months I must live on —well—well, nothing, except the recollection of your excellent dinner."

"I am sorry," muttered Dirk, confusedly, "I did not wish to take your money; it was the turn of those accursed dice. See here, let us say no more about it."

"Sir," said Montalvo, with a sudden sternness, "an

officer and a gentleman cannot treat a debt of honour thus; but," he added with a little laugh, "if another gentleman chances to be good enough to change a debt of honour for a debt of honour, the affair is different. If, for instance, it would suit you to lend me four hundred florins, which, added to the six hundred which I have lost to-night, would make a thousand in all, well, it will be a convenience to me, though should it be any inconvenience to you, pray do not think of such a thing."

"Certainly," answered Dirk, "I have won nearly as much as that, and here at my own table. Take them, I beg of you, captain," and emptying a roll of gold into his hand, he counted it with the skill of a merchant, and held it towards him.

Montalvo hesitated. Then he took the money, pouring it carelessly into his pocket.

"You have not checked the sum," said Dirk.

"My friend, it is needless," answered his guest, "your word is rather better than any bond," and again he yawned, remarking that it was getting late.

Dirk waited a few moments, thinking in his coarse, business-like way that the noble Spaniard might wish to say something about a written acknowledgment. As, however, this did not seem to occur to him, and the matter was not one of ordinary affairs, he led the way back to the table, where the other two were now showing their skill in card tricks.

A few minutes later the two Spaniards took their departure, leaving Dirk and his cousin Brant alone.

"A very successful evening," said Brant, "and, cousin, you won a great deal."

"Yes," answered Dirk, "but all the same I am a poorer man than I was yesterday."

Brant laughed. "Did he borrow of you?" he asked. "Well, I thought he would, and what's more, don't you

count on that money. Montalvo is a good sort of fellow in his own fashion, but he is an extravagant man and a desperate gambler, with a queer history, I fancy—at least nobody knows much about him, not even his brother officers. If you ask them they shrug their shoulders and say that Spain is a big kettle full of all sorts of fish. One thing I do know, however, that he is over head and ears in debt; indeed, there was trouble about it down at The Hague. So, cousin, don't you play with him more than you can help, and don't reckon on that thousand florins to pay your bills with. It is a mystery to me how the man gets on, but I am told that a foolish old vrouw in Amsterdam lent him a lot till she discovered—but there, I don't talk scandal. And now," he added, changing his voice, "is this place private?"

"Let's see," said Dirk, "they have cleared the things away, and the old housekeeper has tidied up my bedroom. Yes, I think so. Nobody ever comes up here after ten o'clock. What is it?"

Brant touched his arm, and, understanding the touch, Dirk led the way into the window-place. There, standing with his back to the room, and his hands crossed in a peculiar fashion, he uttered the word, "*Jesus*," and paused. Brant also crossed his hands and answered, or, rather, continued, "*wept*." It was the password of those of the New Religion.

"You are one of us, cousin?" said Dirk.

"I and all my house, my father, my mother, my sister, and the maiden whom I am to marry. They told me at The Hague that I must seek of you or the young Heer Pieter van de Werff, knowledge of those things which we of the Faith need to know; who are to be trusted, and who are not to be trusted; where prayer is held, and where we may partake of the pure Sacrament of God the Son."

Dirk took his cousin's hand and pressed it. The pres-

sure was returned, and thenceforward brother could not have trusted brother more completely, for now between them was the bond of a common and burning faith.

Such bonds, the reader may say, tie ninety out of every hundred people to each other in the present year of grace, but it is not to be observed that a like mutual confidence results. No, because the circumstances have changed. Thanks very largely to Dirk van Goorl and his fellows of that day, especially to one William of Orange, it is no longer necessary for devout and God-fearing people to creep into holes and corners, like felons hiding from the law, that they may worship the Almighty after some fashion as pure as it is simple, knowing the while that if they are found so doing their lot and the lot of their wives and children will be the torment and the stake. Now the thumbscrew and the rack as instruments for the discomfiture of heretics are relegated to the dusty cases of museums. But some short generations since all this was different, for then a man who dared to disagree with certain doctrines was treated with far less mercy than is shown to a dog on the vivisector's table.

Little wonder, therefore, that those who lay under such a ban, those who were continually walking in the cold shadow of this dreadful doom, clung to each other, loved each other, and comforted each other to the last, passing often enough hand-in-hand through the fiery gates to that country in which there is no more pain. To be a member of the New Religion in the Netherlands under the awful rule of Charles the Emperor and Philip the King was to be one of a vast family. It was not "sir" or "mistress" or "madame," it was "my father" and "my mother," or "my sister" and "my brother;" yes, and between people who were of very different status and almost strangers in the flesh; strangers in the flesh but brethren in spirit.

It will be understood that in these circumstances Dirk

and Brant, already liking each other, and being already connected by blood, were not slow in coming to a complete understanding and fellowship.

There they sat in the window-place telling each other of their families, their hopes and fears, and even of their lady-loves. In this, as in every other respect, Hendrik Brant's story was one of simple prosperity. He was betrothed to a lady of The Hague, the only daughter of a wealthy wine-merchant, who, according to his account, seemed to be as beautiful as she was good and rich, and they were to be married in the spring. But when Dirk told him of his affair, he shook his wise young head.

"You say that both she and her aunt are Catholics?" he asked.

"Yes, cousin, this is the trouble. I think that she is fond of me, or, at any rate, she was until a few days since," he added ruefully, "but how can I, being a 'heretic,' ask her to plight her troth to me unless I tell her? And that, you know, is against the rule; indeed, I scarcely dare to do so."

"Had you not best consult with some godly elder who by prayer and words may move your lady's heart till the light shines on her?" asked Brant.

"Cousin, it has been done, but always there is the other in the way, that red-nosed Aunt Clara, who is a mad idolater; also there is the serving-woman, Greta, whom I take for little better than a spy. Therefore, between the two of them I see little chance that Lysbeth will ever hear the truth this side of marriage. And yet how dare I marry her? Is it right that I should marry her and therefore, perhaps, bring her too to some dreadful fate such as may wait for you or me? Moreover, now since this man Montalvo has crossed my path, all things seem to have gone wrong between me and Lysbeth; indeed but yesterday her door was shut on me."

"Women have their fancies," answered Brant, slowly; "perhaps he has taken hers; she would not be the first who walked that plank. Or, perhaps, she is vexed with you for not speaking out ere this; for, man, not knowing what you are, how can she read your mind?"

"Perhaps, perhaps," said Dirk, "but I know not what to do," and in his perplexity he struck his forehead with his hand.

"Then, brother, in that case what hinders that we should ask Him Who can tell you?" said Brant, calmly.

Dirk understood what he meant at once. "It is a wise thought, and a good one, cousin. I have the Holy Book; first let us pray, and then we can seek wisdom there."

"You are rich, indeed," answered Brant; "sometime you must tell me how and where you came by it."

"Here in Leyden, if one can afford to pay for them, such goods are not hard to get," said Dirk; "what *is* hard is to keep them safely, for to be found with a Bible in your pocket is to carry your own death-warrant."

Brant nodded. "Is it safe to show it here?" he asked.

"As safe as anywhere, cousin; the window is shuttered, the door is, or will be, locked, but who can say that he is safe this side of the stake in a land where the rats and mice carry news and the winds bear witness? Come, I will show you where I keep it," and going to the mantelpiece he took down a candle-stick, a quaint brass, ornamented on its massive oblong base with two copper snails, and lit the candle. "Do you like the piece?" he asked; "it is my own design, which I cast and filed out in my spare hours," and he gazed at the holder with the affection of an artist. Then without waiting for an answer, he led the way to the door of his sitting-room and paused.

"What is it?" asked Brant.

"I thought I heard a sound, that is all, but doubtless

the old vrouw moves upon the stairs. Turn the key, cousin, so, now come on."

They entered the sleeping chamber, and having glanced round and made sure that it was empty, and the window shut, Dirk went to the head of the bed, which was formed of oak-panels, the centre one carved with a magnificent coat-of-arms, fellow to that in the fireplace of the sitting-room. At this panel Dirk began to work, till presently it slid aside, revealing a hollow, out of which he took a book bound in boards covered with leather. Then, having closed the panel, the two young men returned to the sitting-room, and placed the volume upon the oak table beneath the chandelier.

"First let us pray," said Brant.

It seems curious, does it not, that two young men as a *finale* to a dinner party, and a gambling match at which the stakes had not been low; young men who like others had their weaknesses, for one of them, at any rate, could drink too much wine at times, and both being human doubtless had further sins to bear, should suggest kneeling side by side to offer prayers to their Maker before they studied the Scriptures? But then in those strange days prayer, now so common (and so neglected) an exercise, was an actual luxury. To these poor hunted men and women it was a joy to be able to kneel and offer thanks and petitions to God, believing themselves to be safe from the sword of those who worshipped otherwise. Thus it came about that, religion being forbidden, was to them a very real and earnest thing, a thing to be indulged in at every opportunity with solemn and grateful hearts. So there, beneath the light of the guttering candles, they knelt side by side while Brant, speaking for both of them, offered up a prayer—a sight touching enough and in its way beautiful.

The words of his petition do not matter. He prayed for their Church; he prayed for their country that it might be



THERE, BENEATH THE LIGHT OF THE GUTTERING CANDLES, THEY KNELT

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made strong and free; he even prayed for the Emperor, the carnal, hare-lipped, guzzling, able Hapsburg self-seeker. Then he prayed for themselves and all who were dear to them, and lastly, that light might be vouchsafed to Dirk in his present difficulty. No, not quite lastly, for he ended with a petition that their enemies might be forgiven, yes, even those who tortured them and burnt them at the stake, since they knew not what they did. It may be wondered whether any human aspirations could have been more thoroughly steeped in the true spirit of Christianity.

When at length he had finished they rose from their knees.

"Shall I open the Book at a hazard," asked Dirk, "and read what my eye falls on?"

"No," answered Brant, "for it savours of superstition; thus did the ancients with the writings of the poet Virgilius, and it is not fitting that we who hold the light should follow the example of those blind heathen. What work of the Book, brother, are you studying now?"

"The first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, which I have never read before," he answered.

"Then begin where you left off, brother, and read your chapter. Perhaps we may find instruction in it; if not, no answer is vouchsafed to us to-night."

So from the black-letter volume before him Dirk began to read the seventh chapter, in which, as it chances, the great Apostle deals with the marriage state. On he read, in a quiet even voice, till he came to the twelfth and four following verses, of which the last three run: "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now they are holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases; but God has called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O, wife, whether thou

shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O, man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" Dirk's voice trembled, and he paused.

"Continue to the end of the chapter," said Brant, so the reader went on.

There is a sound. They do not hear it, but the door of the bedchamber behind them opens ever so little. They do not see it, but between door and lintel something white thrusts itself, a woman's white face crowned with black hair, and set in it two evil, staring eyes. Surely, when first he raised his head in Eden, Satan might have worn such a countenance as this. It cranes itself forward till the long, thin neck seems to stretch; then suddenly a stir or a movement alarms it, and back the face draws like the crest of a startled snake. Back it draws, and the door closes again.

The chapter is read, the prayer is prayed, and strange may seem the answer to that prayer, an answer to shake out faith from the hearts of men; men who are impatient, who do not know that as the light takes long in travelling from a distant star, so the answer from the Throne to the supplication of trust may be long in coming. It may not come to-day or to-morrow. It may not come in this generation or this century; the prayer of to-day may receive its crown when the children's children of the lips that uttered it have in their turn vanished in the dust. And yet that Divine reply may in no wise be delayed; even as our liberty of this hour may be the fruit of those who died when Dirk van Goorl and Hendrik Brant walked upon the earth; even as the vengeance that but now is falling on the Spaniard may be the reward of the deeds of shame that he worked upon them and upon their kin long generations gone. For the Throne is still the Throne, and the star is still the star; from the one flows justice and from the other light, and to them time and space are naught.

Dirk finished the chapter and closed the Book.

"It seems that you have your answer, brother," said Brant quietly.

"Yes," replied Dirk, "it is written large enough:—'The unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband . . . how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?' Had the Apostle foreseen my case he could not have set the matter forth more clearly."

"He, or the Spirit in him, knew all cases, and wrote for every man that ever shall be born," answered Brant. "This is a lesson to us. Had you looked sooner you would have learned sooner, and mayhap much trouble might have been spared. As it is, without doubt you must make haste and speak to her at once, leaving the rest with God."

"Yes," said Dirk, "so soon as may be, but there is one thing more; ought I tell her all the truth?"

"I should not be careful to hide it, friend, and now, good night. No, do not come to the door with me. Who can tell, there may be watchers without, and it is not wise that we should be seen together so late."

When his cousin and new-found friend had gone Dirk sat for a while, till the guttering tallow lights overhead burned to the sockets indeed. Then, taking the candle from the snail-adorned holder, he lit it, and, having extinguished those in the chandeliers, went into his bedroom and undressed himself. The Bible he returned to its hiding-place and closed the panel, after which he blew out the light and climbed into the tall bed.

As a rule Dirk was a most excellent sleeper; when he laid his head on the pillow his eyes closed nor did they open again until the appointed and accustomed hour. But this night he could not sleep. Whether it was the dinner or the wine, or the gambling, or the prayer and the searching of the Scriptures with his cousin Brant, the result

remained the same; he was very wakeful, which annoyed him the more as a man of his race and phlegm found it hard to attribute this unrest to any of these trivial causes. Still, as vexation would not make him sleep, he lay awake watching the moonlight flood the chamber in broad bars and thinking.

Somehow as Dirk thought thus he grew afraid; it seemed to him as though he shared that place with another presence, an evil and malignant presence. Never in his life before had he troubled over or been troubled by tales of spirits, yet now he remembered Montalvo's remark about a ghost, and of a surety he felt as though one were with him there. In this strange and new alarm he sought for comfort and could think of none save that which an old and simple pastor had recommended to him in all hours of doubt and danger, namely, if it could be had, to clasp a Bible to his heart and pray.

Well, both things were easy. Raising himself in bed, in a moment he had taken the book from its hiding-place and closed the panel. Then pressing it against his breast between himself and the mattress he lay down again, and it would seem that the charm worked, for presently he was asleep.

Yet Dirk dreamed a very evil dream. He dreamed that a tall black figure leaned over him, and that a long white hand was stretched out to his bed-head where it wandered to and fro, till at last he heard the panel slide home with a rattling noise.

Then it seemed to him that he woke, and that his eyes met two eyes bent down over him, eyes which searched him as though they would read the very secrets of his heart. He did not stir, he could not, but lo! in this dream of his the figure straightened itself and glided away, appearing and disappearing as it crossed the bars of moonlight until it vanished by the door.

A while later and Dirk woke up in truth, to find that although the night was cold enough the sweat ran in big drops from his brow and body. But now strangely enough his fear was gone, and, knowing that he had but dreamed a dream, he turned over, touched the Bible on his breast, and fell sleeping like a child, to be awakened only by the light of the rising winter sun pouring on his face.

Then Dirk remembered that dream of the bygone night, and his heart grew heavy, for it seemed to him that this vision of a dark woman searching his face with those dreadful eyes was a portent of evil not far away.

CHAPTER VI

THE BETROTHAL OF LYSBETH

ON the following morning when Montalvo entered his private room after breakfast, he found a lady awaiting him, in whom, notwithstanding the long cloak and veil she wore, he had little difficulty in recognising Black Meg. In fact Black Meg had been waiting some while, and being a person of industrious habits she had not neglected to use her time to the best advantage.

The reader may remember that when Meg visited the gallant Captain Montalvo upon a previous occasion, she had taken the liberty of helping herself to certain papers which she found lying just inside an unlocked desk. These papers on examination, as she feared might be the case, for the most part proved to be quite unimportant—unpaid accounts, military reports, a billet or two from ladies, and so forth. But in thinking the matter over Black Meg remembered that this desk had another part to it, which seemed to be locked, and, therefore, just in case they should prove useful, she took with her a few skeleton keys and one or two little instruments of steel and attended the pleasure of her noble patron at an hour when she believed that he would be at breakfast in another room. Things went well; he was at breakfast and she was left alone in the chamber with the desk. The rest may be guessed. Replacing the worthless bundle in the unlocked part, by the aid of her keys and instruments she opened the inner half. There sure enough were letters hidden, and in a little drawer two miniatures framed in gold, one of a lady, young and pretty with dark eyes, and the other of two children, a

boy and a girl of five or six years of age. Also there was a curling lock of hair labelled in Montalvo's writing—"Juanita's hair, which she gave me as a keepsake."

Here was treasure indeed whereof Black Meg did not fail to possess herself. Thrusting the letters and other articles into the bosom of her dress to be examined at leisure, she was clever enough, before closing and re-locking the desk, to replace them with a dummy bundle, hastily made up from some papers that lay about.

When everything had been satisfactorily arranged she went outside and chatted for a while with the soldier on guard, only re-entering the room by one door as Montalvo appeared in it through the other.

"Well, my friend," he said, "have you the evidence?"

"I have some evidence, Excellency," she answered. "I was present at the dinner that you ate last night, although none of it came my way, and—I was present afterwards."

"Indeed. I thought I saw you slip in, and allow me to congratulate you on that; it was very well thought out and done, just as folk were moving up and down the stairs. Also, when I went home, I believe that I recognised a gentleman in the street whom I have been given to understand you honour with your friendship, a short, stout person with a bald head; let me see, he was called the Butcher at The Hague, was he not? No, do not pout, I have no wish to pry into the secrets of ladies, but still in my position here it is my business to know a thing or two. Well, what did you see?"

"Excellency, I saw the young man I was sent to watch and Hendrik Brant, the son of the rich goldsmith at The Hague, praying side by side upon their knees."

"That is bad, very bad," said Montalvo shaking his head, "but——"

"I saw," she went on in her hoarse voice, "the pair of them read the Bible."

"How shocking!" replied Montalvo with a simulated shudder. "Think of it, my orthodox friend, if you are to be believed, these two persons, hitherto supposed to be respectable, have been discovered in the crime of consulting that work upon which our Faith is founded. Well, those who could read anything so dull must, indeed, as the edicts tell us, be monsters unworthy to live. But, if you please, your proofs. Of course you have this book?"

Then Black Meg poured forth all her tale—how she had watched and seen something, how she had listened and heard little, how she had gone to the secret panel, bending over the sleeping man, and found—nothing.

"You are a poor sort of spy, mother," commented the captain when she had done, "and, upon my soul, I do not believe that even a Papal inquisitor could hang that young fellow on your evidence. You must go back and get some more."

"No," answered Black Meg with decision, "if you want to force your way into conventicles you had best do it yourself. As I wish to go on living here is no job for me. I have proved to you that this young man is a heretic, so now give me my reward."

"Your reward? Ah! your reward. No, I think not at present, for a reward presupposes services—and I see none."

Black Meg began to storm.

"Be silent," said Montalvo, dropping his bantering tone. "Look, I will be frank with you. I do not want to burn anybody. I am sick of all this nonsense about religion, and for aught I care every Netherlander in Leyden may read the Bible until he grows tired. I seek to marry the Jufvrouw Lysbeth van Hout, and to do this I desire to prove that the man whom she loves, Dirk van Goorl, is a heretic. What you have told me may or may not be sufficient for my purpose. If it is sufficient you shall be paid

liberally after my marriage ; if not—well, you have had enough. As for your evidence, for my part I may say that I do not believe a word of it, for were it true you would have brought the Bible."

As he spoke he rang a bell which stood upon a table, and before Meg could answer the soldier appeared.

"Show this good woman out," he said, adding, in a loud voice, "Mother, I will do my best for you and forward your petition to the proper quarter. Meanwhile, take this trifle in charity," and he pressed a florin into her hand. "Now, guard, the prisoners, the prisoners. I have no time to waste—and listen—let me be troubled with no more beggars, or you will hear of it."

That afternoon Dirk, filled with a solemn purpose, and dressed in his best suit, called at the house in the Bree Straat, where the door was again opened by Greta, who looked at him expectantly.

"Is your mistress in ?" he stammered. "I have come to see your mistress."

"Alas ! Mynheer," answered the young woman, "you are just too late. My mistress and her aunt, the Vrouw Clara, have gone away to stay for a week or ten days as the Vrouw Clara's health required a change."

"Indeed," said Dirk aghast, "and where have they gone ?"

"Oh ! Mynheer, I do not know that, they did not tell me," and no other answer could he extract from her.

So Dirk went away discomfited and pondering. An hour later the Captain Montalvo called, and strange to say proved more fortunate. By hook or by crook he obtained the address of the ladies, who were visiting, it appeared, at a seaside village within the limits of a ride. By a curious coincidence that very afternoon Montalvo, also seeking rest and change of air, appeared at the inn of this village,

giving it out that he proposed to lodge there for a while.

As he walked upon the beach next day, whom should he chance to meet but the Vrouw Clara van Ziel, and never did the worthy Clara spend a more pleasant morning. So at least she declared to Lysbeth when she brought her cavalier back to dinner.

The reader may guess the rest. Montalvo paid his court, and in due course Montalvo was refused. He bore the blow with a tender resignation.

"Confess, dear lady," he said, "that there is some other man more fortunate."

Lysbeth did not confess, but, on the other hand, neither did she deny.

"If he makes you happy I shall be more than satisfied," the Count murmured, "but, lady, loving you as I do, I do not wish to see you married to a heretic."

"What do you mean, Señor?" asked Lysbeth, bridling.

"Alas!" he answered, "I mean that, as I fear, the worthy Heer Dirk van Goorl, a friend of mine for whom I have every respect, although he has outstripped me in your regard, has fallen into that evil net."

"Such accusations should not be made," said Lysbeth sternly, "unless they can be proved. Even then——," and she stopped.

"I will inquire further," replied the swain. "For myself I accept the position, that is until you learn to love me, if such should be my fortune. Meanwhile I beg of you at least to look upon me as a friend, a true friend who would lay down his life to serve you."

Then, with many a sigh, Montalvo departed home to Leyden upon his beautiful black horse, but not before he had enjoyed a few minutes' earnest conversation with the worthy Tante Clara.

"Now, if only this old lady were concerned," he re-

flected as he rode away, "the matter might be easy enough, and the Saints know it would be one to me, but unhappily that obstinate pig of a Hollander girl has all the money in her own right. In what labours do not the necessities of rank and station involve a man who by disposition requires only ease and quiet! Well, my young friend Lysbeth, if I do not make you pay for these exertions before you are two months older, my name is not Juan de Montalvo."

Three days later the ladies returned to Leyden. Within an hour of their arrival the Count called, and was admitted.

"Stay with me," said Lysbeth to her Aunt Clara as the visitor was announced, and for a while she stayed. Then, making an excuse, she vanished from the room, and Lysbeth was left face to face with her tormentor.

"Why do you come here?" she asked; "I have given you my answer."

"I come for your own sake," he replied, "to give you my reasons for conduct which you may think strange. You remember a certain conversation?"

"Perfectly," broke in Lysbeth.

"A slight mistake, I think, Jufvrouw, I mean a conversation about an excellent friend of yours, whose spiritual affairs seem to interest you."

"What of it, Señor?"

"Only this; I have made inquiries, and——"

Lysbeth looked up unable to conceal her anxiety.

"Oh! Jufvrouw, let me beg of you to learn to control your expression; the open face of childhood is so dangerous in these days."

"He is my cousin."

"I know; were he anything more, I should be so grieved, but we can most of us spare a cousin or two."

"If you would cease amusing yourself, Señor——"

"And come to the point? Of course I will. Well, the

result of my inquiries has been to find out that this worthy person *is* a heretic of the most pernicious sort. I said inquiries, but there was no need for me to make any. He has been——"

"Not denounced," broke in Lysbeth.

"Oh! my dear lady, again that tell-tale emotion from which all sorts of things might be concluded. Yes—denounced—but fortunately to myself as a person appointed under the Edict. It will, I fear, be my duty to have him arrested this evening—you wish to sit down, allow me to hand you a chair—but I shall not deal with the case myself. Indeed, I propose to pass him over to the worthy Ruard Tapper, the Papal Inquisitor, you know—every one has heard of the unpleasant Tapper—who is to visit Leyden next week, and who, no doubt, will make short work of him."

"What has he done?" asked Lysbeth in a low voice, and bending down her head to hide the working of her features.

"Done? My dear lady, it is almost too dreadful to tell you. This misguided and unfortunate young man, with another person whom the witnesses have not been able to identify, was seen at midnight reading the Bible."

"The Bible! Why should that be wrong?"

"Hush! Are you also a heretic? Do you not know that all this heresy springs from the reading of the Bible? You see, the Bible is a very strange book. It seems that there are many things in it which, when read by an ordinary layman, appear to mean this or that. When read by a consecrated priest, however, they mean something quite different. In the same way, there are many doctrines which the layman cannot find in the Bible that to the consecrated eye are plain as the sun and the moon. The difference between heresy and orthodoxy is, in short, the difference between what can actually be found in the letter of this

remarkable work and what is really there—according to their holinesses."

"Almost thou persuadest me—" began Lysbeth bitterly.

"Hush! lady—to be, what you are, an angel."

There came a pause.

"What will happen to him?" asked Lysbeth.

"After—after the usual painful preliminaries to discover accomplices, I presume the stake, but possibly, as he has the freedom of Leyden, he might get off with hanging."

"Is there no escape?"

Montalvo walked to the window, and looking out of it remarked that he thought it was going to snow. Then suddenly he wheeled round, and staring hard at Lysbeth asked,

"Are you really interested in this heretic, and do you desire to save him?"

Lysbeth heard and knew at once that the buttons were off the foils. The bantering, whimsical tone was gone. Now her tormentor's voice was stern and cold, the voice of a man who was playing for great stakes and meant to win them.

She also gave up fencing.

"I am and I do," she answered.

"Then it can be done—at a price."

"What price?"

"Yourself in marriage within three weeks."

Lysbeth quivered slightly, then sat still.

"Would not my fortune do instead?" she asked.

"Oh! what a poor substitute you offer me," Montalvo said, with a return to his hateful banter. Then he added, "That offer might be considered were it not for the abominable laws which you have here. In practice it would be almost impossible for you to hand over any large sum, much of which is represented by real estate, to a man who is not your husband. Therefore I am afraid I must stipulate that you and your possessions shall not be separated."

Again Lysbeth sat silent. Montalvo, watching her with genuine interest, saw signs of rebellion, perchance of despair. He saw the woman's mental and physical loathing of himself conquering her fears for Dirk. Unless he was much mistaken she was about to defy him, which, as a matter of fact, would have proved exceedingly awkward, as his pecuniary resources were exhausted. Also on the very insufficient evidence which he possessed he would not have dared to touch Dirk, and thus make to himself a thousand powerful enemies.

"It is strange," he said, "that the irony of circumstances should reduce me to pleading for a rival. But, Lysbeth van Hout, before you answer I beg you to think. Upon the next movements of your lips it depends whether that body you love shall be stretched upon the rack, whether those eyes which you find pleasant shall grow blind with agony in the darkness of a dungeon, and whether that flesh which you think desirable shall scorch and wither in the furnace. Or, on the other hand, whether none of these things shall happen, whether this young man shall go free, to be for a month or two a little piqued—a little bitter—about the inconstancy of women, and then to marry some opulent and respected heretic. Surely you could scarcely hesitate. Oh! where is the self-sacrificing spirit of the sex of which we hear so much? Choose."

Still there was no answer. Montalvo, playing his trump card, drew from his vest an official-looking document, sealed and signed.

"This," he said, "is the information to be given to the incorruptible Ruard Tapper. Look, here written on it is your cousin's name. My servant waits for me in your kitchen. If you hesitate any longer, I call him and in your presence charge him to hand that paper to the messenger who starts this afternoon for Brussels. Once given it cannot be recalled and the pious Dirk's doom is sealed."

Lysbeth's spirit began to break. "How can I?" she asked. "It is true that we are not affianced; perhaps for this very reason which I now learn. But he cares for me and knows that I care for him. Must I then, in addition to the loss of him, be remembered all his life as little better than a light-of-love caught by the tricks and glitter of such a man as you? I tell you that first I will kill myself."

Again Montalvo went to the window, for this hint of suicide was most disconcerting. No one can marry a dead woman, and Lysbeth was scarcely likely to leave a will in his favour. It seemed that what troubled her particularly was the fear lest the young man should think her conduct light. Well, why should she not give him a reason which he would be the first to acknowledge as excellent for breaking with him? Could she, a Catholic, be expected to wed a heretic, and could he not be made to tell her that he was a heretic?

Behold an answer to his question! The Saints themselves, desiring that this pearl of price should continue to rest in the bosom of the true Church, had interfered in his behalf, for there in the street below was Dirk van Goorl approaching Lysbeth's door. Yes, there he was dressed in his best burgher's suit, his brow knit with thought, his step hesitating; a very picture of the timid, doubtful lover.

"Lysbeth van Hout," said the Count, turning to her, "as it chances the Heer Dirk van Goorl is at your door. You will admit him, and this matter can be settled one way or the other. I wish to point out to you how needless it is that the young man should be left believing that you have treated him ill. All which is necessary is that you should ask whether or no he is of your faith. If I know him, he will not lie to you. Then it remains only for you to say—for doubtless the man comes here to seek your hand—that however much it may grieve you to give such

an answer, you can take no heretic to husband. Do you understand?"

Lysbeth bowed her head.

"Then listen. You will admit your suitor; you will allow him to make his offer to you now—if he is so inclined; you will, before giving any answer, ask him of his faith. If he replies that he is a heretic, you will dismiss him as kindly as you wish. If he replies that he is a true servant of the Church, you will say that you have heard a different tale and must have time to make inquiries. Remember also that if by one jot you do otherwise than I have bid you, when Dirk van Goorl leaves the room you see him for the last time, unless it pleases you—to attend his execution. Whereas if you obey and dismiss him finally, as the door shuts behind him I put this Information in the fire and satisfy you that the evidence upon which it is based is for ever deprived of weight and done with."

Lysbeth looked a question.

"I see you are wondering how I should know what you do or do not do. It is simple. I shall be the harmless but observant witness of your interview. Over this doorway hangs a tapestry; you will grant me the privilege—not a great one for a future husband—of stepping behind it."

"Never, never," said Lysbeth, "I cannot be put to such a shame. I defy you."

As she spoke came the sound of knocking at the street door. Glancing up at Montalvo, for the second time she saw that look which he had worn at the crisis of the sledge race. All its urbanity, its careless *bonhomie,* had vanished. Instead of these appeared a reflection of the last and innermost nature of the man, the rock foundation, as it were, upon which was built the false and decorated superstructure that he showed to the world. There were the glaring eyes, there the grinning teeth of the Spanish wolf; a ravening

brute ready to rend and tear, if so he might satisfy himself with the meat his soul desired.

"Don't play tricks with me," he muttered, "and don't argue, for there is no time. Do as I bid you, girl, or on your head will be this psalm-singing fellow's blood. And, look you, don't try setting him on me, for I have my sword and he is unarmed. If need be a heretic may be killed at sight, you know, that is by one clothed with authority. When the servant announces him go to the door and order that he is to be admitted," and picking up his plumed hat, which might have betrayed him, Montalvo stepped behind the arras.

For a moment Lysbeth stood thinking. Alas! she could see no possible escape, she was in the toils, the rope was about her throat. Either she must obey or, so she thought, she must give the man she loved to a dreadful death. For his sake she would do it, for his sake and might God forgive her! Might God avenge her and him!

Another instant and there came a knock upon the door. She opened it.

"The Heer van Goorl stands below," said the voice of Greta, "wishing to see you, madam."

"Admit him," answered Lysbeth, and going to a chair almost in the centre of the room, she seated herself.

Presently Dirk's step sounded on the stair, that known, beloved step for which so often she had listened eagerly. Again the door opened and Greta announced the Heer van Goorl. That she could not see the Captain Montalvo evidently surprised the woman, for her eyes roamed round the room wonderingly, but she was too well trained, or too well bribed, to show her astonishment. Gentlemen of this kidney, as Greta had from time to time remarked, have a faculty for vanishing upon occasion.

So Dirk walked into the fateful chamber as some innocent and unsuspecting creature walks into a bitter snare,

little knowing that the lady whom he loved and whom he came to win was set as a bait to ruin him.

"Be seated, cousin," said Lysbeth, in a voice so forced and strained that it caused him to look up. But he saw nothing, for her head was turned away from him, and for the rest his mind was too preoccupied to be observant. By nature simple and open, it would have taken much to wake Dirk into suspicion in the home and presence of his love and cousin, Lysbeth.

"Good day to you, Lysbeth," he said awkwardly; "why, how cold your hand is! I have been trying to find you for some time, but you have always been out or away, leaving no address."

"I have been to the sea with my Aunt Clara," she answered.

Then for a while—five minutes or more—there followed a strained and stilted conversation.

"Will the booby never come to the point?" reflected Montalvo, surveying him through a join in the tapestry. "By the Saints, what a fool he looks!"

"Lysbeth," said Dirk at last, "I want to speak to you."

"Speak on, cousin," she answered.

"Lysbeth, I—I—have loved you for a long while, and I—have come to ask you to marry me. I have put it off for a year or more for reasons which I hope to tell you some day, but I can keep silent no longer, especially now when I see that a much finer gentleman is trying to win you—I mean the Spanish Count, Montalvo," he added with a jerk.

She said nothing in reply. So Dirk went on pouring out all his honest passion in words that momentarily gathered weight and strength, till at length they were eloquent enough. He told her how since first they met he had loved her and only her, and how his one desire in life was to make

her happy and be happy with her. Pausing at length he began to speak of his prospects—then she stopped him.

"Your pardon, Dirk," she said, "but I have a question to ask of you," and her voice died away in a kind of sob. "I have heard rumours about you," she went on presently, "which must be cleared up. I have heard, Dirk, that by faith you are what is called a heretic. Is it true?"

He hesitated before answering, feeling that much depended on that answer. But it was only for an instant, since Dirk was far too honest a man to lie.

"Lysbeth," he said, "I will tell to you what I would not tell to any other living creature, not being one of my own brotherhood, for whether you accept me or reject me, I know well that I am as safe in speaking to you as when upon my knees I speak to the God I serve. I *am* what you call a heretic. I am a member of that true faith to which I hope to draw you, but which if you do not wish it I should never press upon you. It is chiefly because I am what I am that for so long I have hung back from speaking to you, since I did not know whether it would be right—things being thus—to ask you to mix your lot with mine, or whether I ought to marry you, if you would marry me, keeping this secret from you. Only the other night I sought counsel of—well, never mind of whom—and we prayed together, and together searched the Word of God. And there, Lysbeth, by some wonderful mercy, I found my prayer answered and my doubts solved, for the great St. Paul had foreseen this case, as in that Book all cases are foreseen, and I read how the unbelieving wife may be sanctified by the husband, and the unbelieving husband by the wife. Then everything grew clear to me, and I determined to speak. And now, dear, I have spoken, and it is for you to answer."

"Dirk, dear Dirk," she replied almost with a cry, "alas! for the answer which I must give you. Renounce the error

of your ways, make confession, and be reconciled to the Church and—I will marry you. Otherwise I cannot, no, and although I love you, you and no other man"—here she put an energy into her voice that was almost dreadful —"with all my heart and soul and body; I cannot, I cannot, I cannot!"

Dirk heard, and his ruddy face turned ashen grey.

"Cousin," he replied, "you seek of me the one thing which I must not give. Even for your sake I may not renounce my vows and my God as I behold Him. Though it break my heart to bid you farewell and live without you, here I pay you back in your own words—I cannot, I cannot!"

Lysbeth looked at him, and lo! his short, massive form and his square-cut, honest countenance in that ardour of renunciation had suffered a change to things almost divine. At that moment—to her sight at least—this homely Hollander wore the aspect of an angel. She ground her teeth and pressed her hands upon her heart. "For his sake—to save him," she muttered to herself—then she spoke.

"I respect you for it, I love you for it more than ever; but, Dirk, it is over between us. One day, here or hereafter, you will understand and you will forgive."

"So be it," said Dirk hastily, stretching out his hand to find his hat, for he was too blind to see. "It is a strange answer to my prayer, a very strange answer; but doubtless you are right to follow your lights as I am sure that I am right to follow mine. We must carry our cross, dear Lysbeth, each of us; you see that we must carry our cross. Only I beg of you—I don't speak as a jealous man, because the thing has gone further than jealousy—I speak as a friend, and come what may while I live you will always find me that—I beg of you, beware of the Spaniard, Montalvo. I know that he followed you to the coast; I have heard too he boasts that he will marry you. The man is wicked,



"I CANNOT, I CANNOT!"

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although he took me in at first. I feel it—his presence seems to poison the air, yes, this very air I breathe. But oh ! and I should like him to hear me say it, because I am sure that he is at the bottom of all this, his hour will come. For whatever he does he will be paid back ; he will be paid back here and hereafter. And now, good-bye. God bless you and protect you, dear Lysbeth. If you think it wrong you are quite right not to marry me, and I know that you will keep my secret. Good-bye again," and lifting her hand Dirk kissed it. Then he stumbled from the room.

As for Lysbeth she cast herself at full length, and in the bitterness of her heart beat her brow upon the boards.

When the front door had shut behind Dirk, but not before, Montalvo emerged from his hiding place and stood over the prostrate Lysbeth. He tried to adopt his airy and sarcastic manner, but he was shaken by the scene which he had overheard, shaken and somewhat frightened also, for he felt that he had called into being passions of which the force and fruits could not be calculated.

"Bravo ! my little actress," he began, then gave it up and added in his natural voice, "you had best rise and see me burn this paper."

Lysbeth struggled to her knees and watched him thrust the document between two glowing peats.

"I have fulfilled my promise," he said, "and that evidence is done with, but in case you should think of playing any tricks and not fulfilling yours, please remember that I have fresh evidence infinitely more valuable and convincing, to gain which, indeed, I condescended to a stratagem not quite in keeping with my traditions. With my own ears I heard this worthy gentleman, who is pleased to think so poorly of me, admit that he is a heretic. That is enough to burn him any day, and I swear that if within three weeks we are not man and wife, burn he shall."

While he was speaking Lysbeth had risen slowly to her feet. Now she confronted him, no longer the Lysbeth whom he had known, but a new being filled like a cup with fury that was the more awful because it was so quiet.

"Juan de Montalvo," she said in a low voice, "your wickedness has won and for Dirk's sake my person and my goods must pay its price. So be it since so it must be, but listen. I make no prophecies about you; I do not say that this or that shall happen to you, but I call down upon you the curse of God and the execration of men."

Then she threw up her hands and began to pray. "God, Whom it has pleased that I should be given to a fate far worse than death; O God, blast the mind and the soul of this monster. Let him henceforth never know a peaceful hour; let misfortune come upon him through me and mine; let fears haunt his sleep. Let him live in heavy labour and die in blood and misery, and through me; and if I bear children to him, let the evil be upon them also."

She ceased. Montalvo looked at her and tried to speak. Again he looked and again he tried to speak, but no words would come.

Then the fear of Lysbeth van Hout fell upon him, that fear which was to haunt him all his life. He turned and crept from the room, and his face was like the face of an old man, nor, notwithstanding the height of his immediate success, could his heart have been more heavy if Lysbeth had been an angel sent straight from Heaven to proclaim to him the unalterable doom of God.

CHAPTER VII

HENDRIK BRANT HAS A VISITOR

NINE months had gone by, and for more than eight of them Lysbeth had been known as the Countess Juan de Montalvo. Indeed of this there could be no doubt, since she was married with some ceremony by the Bishop in the Groote Kerk before the eyes of all men. Folk had wondered much at these hurried nuptials, though some of the more ill-natured shrugged their shoulders and said that when a young woman had compromised herself by long and lonely drives with a Spanish cavalier, and was in consequence dropped by her own admirer, why the best thing she could do was to marry as soon as possible.

So the pair, who looked handsome enough before the altar, were wed, and went to taste of such nuptial bliss as was reserved for them in Lysbeth's comfortable house in the Bree Straat. Here they lived almost alone, for Lysbeth's countrymen and women showed their disapproval of her conduct by avoiding her company, and, for reasons of his own, Montalvo did not encourage the visiting of Spaniards at his house. Moreover, the servants were changed, while Tante Clara and the girl Greta had also disappeared. Indeed, Lysbeth, finding out the false part which they had played towards her, dismissed them both before her marriage.

It will be guessed that after the events that led to their union Lysbeth took little pleasure in her husband's society. She was not one of those women who can acquiesce in marriage by fraud or capture, and even learn to love the hand which snared them. So it came about that to Mont-

alvo she spoke very seldom ; indeed after the first week of marriage she only saw him on rare occasions. Very soon he found out that his presence was hateful to her, and turned her detestation to account with his usual cleverness. In other words, Lysbeth bought freedom by parting with her property—in fact, a regular tariff was established, so many guilders for a week's liberty, so many for a month's.

This was an arrangement that suited Montalvo well enough, for in his heart he was terrified of this woman, whose beautiful face had frozen into a perpetual mask of watchful hatred. He could not forget that frightful curse which had taken deep root in his superstitious mind, and already seemed to flourish there, for it was true that since she spoke it he had never known a quiet hour. How could he when he was haunted night and day by the fear lest his wife should murder him ?

Surely, if ever Death looked out of a woman's eyes it looked out of hers, and it seemed to him that such a deed might trouble her conscience little ; that she might consider it in the light of an execution, and not as a murder. Bah ! he could not bear to think of it. What would it be to drink his wine one day and then feel a hand of fire gripping at his vitals because poison had been set within the cup ; or, worse still, if anything could be worse, to wake at night and find a stiletto point grating against his backbone ? Little wonder that Montalvo slept alone and was always careful to lock his door.

He need not have taken such precautions ; whatever her eyes might say, Lysbeth had no intention of killing this man. In that prayer of hers she had, as it were, placed the matter in the hand of a higher Power, and there she meant to leave it, feeling quite convinced that although vengeance might tarry it would fall at last. As for her money, he could have it. From the beginning her instinct told her that her husband's object was not amorous, but purely

mercenary, a fact of which she soon had plentiful proof, and her great, indeed her only hope was that when the wealth was gone he would go too. An otter, says the Dutch proverb, does not nest in a dry dyke.

But oh ! what months those were, what dreadful months ! From time to time she saw her husband—when he wanted cash—and every night she heard him returning home, often with unsteady steps. Twice or thrice a week also she was commanded to prepare a luxurious meal for himself and some six or eight companions, to be followed by a gambling party at which the stakes ruled high. Then in the morning, before he was up, strange people would arrive, Jews some of them, and wait till they could see him, or catch him as he slipped from the house by a back way. These men, Lysbeth discovered, were duns seeking payment of old debts. Under such constant calls her fortune, which if substantial was not great, melted rapidly. Soon the ready money was gone, then the shares in certain ships were sold, then the land and the house itself were mortgaged.

So the time went on.

Almost immediately after his refusal by Lysbeth, Dirk van Goorl had left Leyden, and returned to Alkmaar, where his father lived. His cousin and friend, however, Hendrik Brant, remained there studying the jeweller's art under the great master of filigree work, who was known as Petrus. One morning, as Hendrik was sitting at breakfast in his lodging, it was announced that a woman who would not give her name, wished to see him. Moved more by curiosity than by any other reason, he ordered her to be admitted. When she entered he was sorry, for in the gaunt person and dark-eyed face he recognised one against whom he had been warned by the elders of his church as a spy, a creature who was employed by the papal inquisitors

to get up cases against heretics, and who was known as Black Meg.

"What is your business with me?" Brant asked sternly.

"Nothing to your hurt, worthy Heer, believe me, nothing to your hurt. Oh! yes, I know that tales are told against me, who only earn an honest living in an honest way, to keep my poor husband, who is an imbecile. Once alas! he followed that mad Anabaptist fool, John of Leyden, the fellow who set up as a king, and said that men might have as many wives as they wished. That was what sent my husband silly, but, thanks be to the Saints, he has repented of his errors and is reconciled to the Church and Christian marriage, and now, I, who have a forgiving nature, am obliged to support him."

"Your business?" said Brant.

"Mynheer," she answered, dropping her husky voice, "you are a friend of the Countess Montalvo, she who was Lysbeth van Hout?"

"No, I am acquainted with her, that is all."

"At least you are a friend of the Heer Dirk van Goorl who has left this town for Alkmaar; he who was her lover?"

"Yes, I am his cousin, but he is not the lover of any married woman."

"No, no, of course not; love cannot look through a bridal veil, can it? Still, you are his friend, and, therefore, perhaps, her friend, and—she isn't happy."

"Indeed? I know nothing of her present life: she must reap the field which she has sown. That door is shut."

"Not altogether perhaps. I thought it might interest Dirk van Goorl to learn that it is still ajar."

"I don't see why it should. Fish merchants are not interested in rotten herrings; they write off the loss and send out the smack for a fresh cargo."

"The first fish we catch is ever the finest, Mynheer, and if we haven't quite caught it, oh! what a fine fish is that."

"I have no time to waste in chopping riddles. What is your errand? Tell it, or leave it untold, but be quick."

Black Meg leant forward, and the hoarse voice sank to a cavernous whisper.

"What will you give me," she asked, "if I prove to you that the Captain Montalvo is not married at all to Lysbeth van Hout?"

"It does not much matter what I would give you, for I saw the thing done in the Groote Kerk yonder."

"Things are not always done that seem to be done."

"Look here, woman, I have had enough of this," and Brant pointed to the door.

Black Meg did not stir, only she produced a packet from the bosom of her dress and laid it on the table.

"A man can't have two wives living at once, can he?"

"No, I suppose not—that is, legally."

"Well, if I show you that Montalvo has two wives, how much?"

Brant became interested. He hated Montalvo; he guessed, indeed he knew something of the part which the man had played in this infamous affair, and knew also that it would be a true kindness to Lysbeth to rid her of him.

"If you *proved* it," he said, "let us say two hundred florins."

"It is not enough, Mynheer."

"It is all I have to offer, and, mind you, what I promise I pay."

"Ah! yes, the other promises and doesn't pay—the rogue, the rogue," she added, striking a bony fist upon the table. "Well, I agree, and I ask no bond, for you merchant folk are not like cavaliers, your word is as good as

your paper. Now read these," and she opened the packet and pushed its contents towards him.

With the exception of two miniatures, which he placed upon one side, they were letters written in Spanish and in a very delicate hand. Brant knew Spanish well, and in twenty minutes he had read them all. They proved to be epistles from a lady who signed herself Juanita de Montalvo, written to the Count Juan de Montalvo, whom she addressed as her husband. Very piteous documents they were also, telling a tale that need not be set out here of heartless desertion; pleading for the writer's sake and for the sake of certain children, that the husband and father would return to them, or at least remit them means to live, for they, his wife and family, were sunk in great poverty.

"All this is sad enough," said Brant with a gesture of disgust as he glanced at the miniature of the lady and her children, "but it proves nothing. How are we to know that she is the man's wife?"

Black Meg put her hand into the bosom of her dress and produced another letter dated not more than three months ago. It was, or purported to be written by the priest of the village where the lady lived, and was addressed to the Captain the Count Juan de Montalvo at Leyden. In substance this epistle was an earnest appeal to the noble count from one who had a right to speak, as the man who had christened him, taught him, and married him to his wife, either to return to her or to forward her the means to join him. "A dreadful rumour," the letter ended, "has reached us here in Spain that you have taken to wife a Dutch lady at Leyden named Van Hout, but this I do not believe, since never could you have committed such a crime before God and man. Write, write at once, my son, and disperse this black cloud of scandal which is gathering on your honoured and ancient name."

"How did you come by these, woman?" asked Brant.

"The last I had from a priest who brought it from Spain. I met him at The Hague, and offered to deliver the letter, as he had no safe means of sending it to Leyden. The others and the pictures I stole out of Montalvo's room."

"Indeed, most honest merchant, and what might you have been doing in his Excellency's room?"

"I will tell you," she answered, "for, as he never gave me my pay, my tongue is loosed. He wished for evidence that the Heer Dirk van Goorl was a heretic, and employed me to find it."

Brant's face hardened, and he became more watchful.

"Why did he wish such evidence?"

"To use it to prevent the marriage of Jufvrouw Lysbeth with the Heer Dirk van Goorl."

"How?"

Meg shrugged her shoulders. "By telling his secret to her so that she might dismiss him, I suppose, or more likely by threatening that, if she did not, he would hand her lover over to the Inquisitors."

"I see. And did you get the evidence?"

"Well, I hid in the Heer Dirk's bedroom one night, and looking through a door saw him and another young man, whom I do not know, reading the Bible, and praying together."

"Indeed; what a terrible risk you must have run, for had those young men, or either of them, chanced to catch you, it is quite certain that you would not have left that room alive. You know these heretics think that they are justified in killing a spy at sight, and, upon my word, I do not blame them. In fact, my good woman," and he leaned forward and looked her straight in the eyes, "were I in the same position I would have knocked you on the head as readily as though you had been a rat."

Black Meg shrank back, and turned a little blue about the lips.

"Of course, Mynheer, of course, it is a rough game, and the poor agents of God must take their risks. Not that the other young man had any cause to fear. I wasn't paid to watch him, and—as I have said—I neither know nor care who he is."

"Well, who can say, that may be fortunate for you, especially if he should ever come to know or to care who you are. But it is no affair of ours, is it? Now, give me those letters. What, do you want your money first? Very well," and, rising, Brant went to a cupboard and produced a small steel box, which he unlocked; and, having taken from it the appointed sum, locked it again. "There you are," he said; "oh, you needn't stare at the cupboard; that box won't live there after to-day, or anywhere in this house. By the way, I understand that Montalvo never paid you."

"Not a stiver," she answered with a sudden access of rage; "the low thief, he promised to pay me after his marriage, but instead of rewarding her who put him in that warm nest, I tell you that already he has squandered every florin of the noble lady's money in gambling and satisfying such debts as he was obliged to, so that to-day I believe that she is almost a beggar."

"I see," said Brant, "and now good morning, and look you, if we should chance to meet in the town, you will understand that I do not know you."

"I understand, Mynheer," said Black Meg with a grin and vanished.

When she had gone Brant rose and opened the window. "Bah!" he said, "the air is poisoned. But I think I frightened her, I think that I have nothing to fear. Yet who can tell? My God! she saw me reading the Bible, and Montalvo knows it! Well, it is some time ago now, and I must take my chance."

Ah! who could tell indeed?

Then, taking the miniatures and documents with him, Brant started to call upon his friend and co-religionist, the Heer Pieter van de Werff, Dirk van Goorl's friend, and Lysbeth's cousin, a young man for whose judgment and abilities he had a great respect. As a result of this visit, these two gentlemen left that afternoon for Brussels, the seat of Government, where they had very influential friends.

It will be sufficient to tell the upshot of their visit. Just at that time the Government of the Netherlands wished for its own reasons to stand well with the citizen class, and when those in authority learned of the dreadful fraud that had been played off upon a lady of note who was known to be a good Catholic, for the sole object of robbing her of her fortune, there was indignation in high places. Indeed, an order was issued, signed by a hand which could not be resisted—so deeply was one woman moved by the tale of another's wrong—that the Count Montalvo should be seized and put upon his trial, just as though he were any common Netherland malefactor. Moreover, since he was a man with many enemies, no one was found to stand between him and the Royal decree.

Three days later Montalvo made an announcement to Lysbeth. For a wonder he was supping at home alone with his wife, whose presence he had commanded. She obeyed and attended, sitting at the further end of the table, whence she rose from time to time to wait upon him with her own hands. Watching him the while with her quiet eyes, she noticed that he was ill at ease.

"Cannot you speak?" he asked at last and savagely. "Do you think it is pleasant for a man to sit opposite a woman who looks like a corpse in her coffin till he wishes she were one?"

"So do I," answered Lysbeth, and again there was silence.

Presently she broke it. "What do you want?" she asked. "More money?"

"Of course I want money," he answered furiously.

"Then there is none; everything has gone, and the notary tells me that no one will advance another stiver on the house. All my jewellery is sold also."

He glanced at her hand. "You have still that ring," he said.

She looked at it. It was a hoop of gold set with emeralds of considerable value which her husband had given her before marriage and always insisted upon her wearing. In fact, it had been bought with the money which he borrowed from Dirk van Goorl.

"Take it," she said, smiling for the first time, and drawing off the ring she passed it over to him. He turned his head aside as he stretched his hand towards the trinket lest his face should betray the shame which even he must feel.

"If your child should be a son," he muttered, "tell him that his father had nothing but a piece of advice to leave him; that he should never touch a dice-box."

"Are you going away then?" she asked.

"For a week or two I must. I have been warned that a difficulty has arisen, about which I need not trouble you. Doubtless you will hear of it soon enough, and though it is not true, I must leave Leyden until the thing blows over. In fact I am going now."

"You are about to desert me," she answered; "having got all my money, I say that you are going to desert me who am—thus! I see it in your face."

Montalvo turned away and pretended not to hear.

"Well, thank God for it," Lysbeth added, "only I wish that you could take your memory and everything else of yours with you."

As these bitter words passed her lips the door opened,

and there entered one of his own subalterns, followed by four soldiers and a man in a lawyer's robe.

"What is this?" asked Montalvo furiously.

The subaltern saluted as he entered:

"My captain, forgive me, but I act under orders, and they are to arrest you alive, or," he added significantly, "dead."

"Upon what charge?" asked Montalvo.

"Here, notary, you had best read the charge," said the subaltern, "but perhaps the lady would like to retire first," he added awkwardly.

"No," answered Lysbeth, "it might concern me."

"Alas! Señora, I fear it does," put in the notary. Then he began to read the document, which was long and legal. But she was quick to understand. Before ever it was done Lysbeth knew that she was not the lawful wife of Count Juan de Montalvo, and that he was to be put upon his trial for his betrayal of her and the trick he had played the Church. So she was free—free, and overcome by that thought she staggered, fell, and swooned away.

When her eyes opened again, Montalvo, officer, notary, and soldiers, all had vanished.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MARE'S STABLE

WHEN Lysbeth's reason returned to her in that empty room, her first sense was one of wild exultation. She was free, she was not Montalvo's wife, never again could she be obliged to see him, never again could she be forced to endure the contamination of his touch—that was her thought. She was sure that the story was true; were it not true who could have moved the authorities to take action against him? Moreover, now that she had the key, a thousand things were explained, trivial enough in themselves, each of them, but in their sum amounting to proof positive of his guilt. Had he not spoken of some entanglement in Spain and of children? Had he not in his sleep—but it was needless to remember all these things. She was free! She was free! and there on the table still lay the symbol of her bondage, the emerald ring that was to give him the means of flight, a flight from this charge which he knew was hanging over him. She took it up, dashed it to the ground and stamped upon it. Next she fell upon her knees, praising and blessing God, and then, worn out, crept away to rest.

The morning came, the still and beautiful autumn morning, but now all her exultation had left her, and Lysbeth was depressed and heavy hearted. She rose and assisted the one servant who remained in the house to prepare their breakfast, taking no heed of the sidelong glances that the woman cast at her. Afterwards she went to the market to spend some of her last florins in necessaries. Here and in the streets she became aware that she was the object of

remark, for people nudged each other and stared at her. Moreover, as she hurried home appalled, her quick ear caught the conversation of two coarse women while they walked behind her.

"She's got it now," said one.

"Serve her right, too," answered the other, "for running after and marrying a Spanish don."

"Marrying?" broke in the first, "it was the best that she could do. She couldn't stop to ask questions. Some corpses must be buried quickly."

Glancing behind her, Lysbeth saw the creature nip her nostrils with her fingers, as though to shut out an evil smell.

Then she could bear it no longer, and turned upon them.

"You are evil slanderers," she said, and walked away swiftly, pursued by the sound of their loud, insulting laughter.

At the house she was told that two men were waiting to see her. They proved to be creditors clamouring for large sums of money, which she could not pay. Lysbeth told them that she knew nothing of the matter. Thereupon they showed her her own writing at the foot of deeds, and she remembered that she had signed more things than she chose to keep count of, everything indeed that the man who called himself her husband put before her, if only to win an hour of blessed freedom from his presence. At length the duns went away vowing that they would have their money if they dragged the bed from under her.

After that came loneliness and silence. No friend appeared to cheer her. Indeed, she had no friends left, for by her husband's command she had broken off her acquaintance with all who after the strange circumstances connected with her marriage were still inclined to know her. He said that he would have no chattering Dutch vrouws about

the house, and they said and believed that the Countess de Montalvo had become too proud to associate with those of her own class and people.

Midday came and she could eat no food; indeed, she had touched none for twenty-four hours; her gorge rose against it, although in her state she needed food. Now the shame of her position began to come home to Lysbeth. She was a wife and no wife; soon she must bear the burden of motherhood, and oh! what would that child be? And what would she be, its mother? What, too, would Dirk think of her? Dirk, for whom she had done and suffered all these things. Through the long afternoon hours she lay upon her bed thinking such thoughts as these till at length her mind gave and Lysbeth grew light-headed. Her brain became a chaos, a perfect hell of distorted imaginations.

Then out of its turmoil and confusion rose a vision and a desire; a vision of peace and a desire for rest. But what rest was there for her except the rest of death? Well, why not die? God would forgive her, the Mother of God would plead for her who was shamed and broken-hearted and unfit to live. Even Dirk would think kindly of her when she was dead, though, doubtless, now if he met her he would cover his eyes with his hand. She was burning hot and she was thirsty. How cool the water would be on this fevered night. What could be better than to slip into it and slowly let it close above her poor aching head? She would go out and look at the water; in that, at any rate, there could be no harm.

She wrapped herself in a long cloak and drew its hood over her head. Then she slipped from the house and stole like a ghost through the darkling streets and out of the Maren or Sea Poort, where the guard let her pass thinking that she was a country woman returning to her village. Now the moon was rising, and by the light of it Lysbeth recog-

nised the place. Here was the spot where she had stood on the day of the ice carnival, when that woman who was called Martha the Mare, and who said that she had known her father, had spoken to her. On that water she had galloped in Montalvo's sledge, and up yonder canal the race was run. She followed along its banks, remembering the reedy mere some miles away spotted with islets that were only visited from time to time by fishermen and wild-fowlers; the great Haarlemer Mere which covered many thousands of acres of ground. That mere she felt sure must look very cool and beautiful on such a night as this, and the wind would whisper sweetly among the tall bulrushes which fringed its banks.

On Lysbeth went and on; it was a long, long walk, but at last she came there, and, oh! the place was sweet and vast and lonely. For so far as her eye could reach in the light of the low moon there was nothing but glimmering water broken here and there by the reed-wreathed islands. Hark! how the frogs croaked and the bitterns boomed among the rushes. Look where the wild ducks swam leaving behind them broad trails of silver as their breasts broke the surface of the great mere into rippling lines.

There, on an island, not a bowshot from her, grew tufts of a daisy-like marsh bloom, white flowers such as she remembered gathering when she was a child. A desire came upon her to pluck some of these flowers, and the water was shallow; surely she could wade to the island, or if not what did it matter? Then she could turn to the bank again, or she might stay to sleep a while in the water; what did it matter? She stepped from the bank—how sweet and cool it felt to her feet! Now it was up to her knees, now it reached her middle, and now the little wavelets beat against her breast. But she would not go back, for there ahead of her was the island, and the white flowers were so close that

she could count them, eight upon one bunch and twelve upon the next. Another step and the water struck her in the face, one more and it closed above her head. She rose, and a low cry broke from her lips.

Then, as in a dream, Lysbeth saw a skiff glide out from among the rushes before her. She saw also a strange, mutilated face, which she remembered dimly, bending over the edge of the boat, and a long, brown hand stretched out to clasp her, while a hoarse voice bade her keep still and fear nothing.

After this came a sound of singing in her ears and —darkness.

When Lysbeth woke again she found herself lying upon the ground, or rather upon a soft mattress of dry reeds and aromatic grasses. Looking round her she saw that she was in a hut, reed-[illegible]ed and plastered with thick mud. In one corner of this hut stood a fireplace with a chimney artfully built of clay, and on the fire of turfs boiled an earthen pot. Hanging from the roof by a string of twisted grass was a fish, fresh caught, a splendid pike, and near to it a bunch of smoked eels. Over her also was thrown a magnificent rug of otter skins. Noting these things, she gathered that she must be in the hovel of some fisherman.

Now by degrees the past came back to Lysbeth, and she remembered her parting with the man who called himself her husband; remembered also her moonlight flight and how she had waded out into the waters of the great mere to pluck the white flowers, and how, as they closed above her head a hand had been stretched out to save her. Lysbeth remembered, and remembering, she sighed aloud. The sound of her sighing seemed to attract the attention of some one who was listening outside the hut; at any rate a rough door was opened or pushed aside and a figure entered.

"Are you awake, lady?" asked a hoarse voice.



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"YOU ARE MARTHA THE MARE"

"Yes," answered Lysbeth, "but tell me, how did I come here, and who are you?"

The figure stepped back so that the light from the open door fell full upon it. "Look, Carolus van Hout's daughter and Juan Montalvo's wife; those who have seen me once do not forget me."

Lysbeth sat up on the bed and stared at the gaunt, powerful form, the deep-set grey eyes, the wide-spread nostrils, the scarred, high cheek-bones, the teeth made prominent by some devil's work upon the lips, and the grizzled lock of hair that hung across the forehead. In an instant she knew her.

"You are Martha the Mare," she said.

"Yes, I am the Mare, none other, and you are in the Mare's stable. What has he been doing to you, that Spanish dog, that you came last night to ask the Great Water to hide you and your shame?"

Lysbeth made no answer; the story seemed hard to begin with this strange woman. Then Martha went on:

"What did I tell you, Lysbeth van Hout? Did I not say that your blood should warn you against the Spaniards? Well, well, you saved me from the ice and I have saved you from the water. Ah! who was it that led me to row round by that outer isle last night because I could not sleep? But what does it matter; God willed it so, and here you lie in the Mare's stable. Nay, do not answer me, first you must eat."

Then, going to the pot, she took it from the fire, pouring its contents into an earthen basin, and, at the smell of them, for the first time for days Lysbeth felt hungry. Of what that stew was compounded she never learned, but she ate it to the last spoonful and was thankful, while Martha, seated on the ground beside her, watched her with delight, from time to time stretching out a long, thin hand to touch the brown hair that hung about her shoulders.

"Come out and look," said Martha when her guest had done eating. And she led her through the doorway of the hut.

Lysbeth gazed round her, but in truth there was not much to see. The hut itself was hidden away in a little clump of swamp willows that grew upon a mound in the midst of a marshy plain, broken here and there by patches of reed and bulrushes. Walking across this plain for a hundred yards or so, they came to more reeds, and in them a boat hidden cunningly, for here was the water of the lake, and, not fifty paces away, what seemed to be the shore of an island. The Mare bade her get into the boat and rowed her across to this island, then round it to another, and thence to another and yet another.

"Now tell me," she said, "upon which of them is my stable built?"

Lysbeth shook her head helplessly.

"You cannot tell, no, nor any living man; I say that no man lives who could find it, save I myself, who know the path there by night or by day. "Look," and she pointed to the vast surface of the mere, "on this great sea are thousands of such islets, and before they find me the Spaniards must search them all, for here upon the lonely waters no spies or hound will help them." Then she began to row again without even looking round, and presently they were in the clump of reeds from which they had started.

"I must be going home," faltered Lysbeth.

"No," answered Martha, "it is too late, you have slept long. Look, the sun is westering fast, this night you must stop with me. Oh! do not be afraid, my fare is rough, but it is sweet and fresh and plenty; fish from the mere as much as you will, for who can catch them better than I? And water-fowl that I snare, yes, and their eggs; moreover, dried flesh and bacon which I get from the mainland, for there I have friends whom sometimes I meet at night."

So Lysbeth yielded, for the great peace of this lake pleased her. Oh! after all that she had gone through it was like heaven to watch the sun sinking towards the quiet water, to hear the wild-fowl call, to see the fish leap and the halcyons flash by, and above all to be sure that by nothing short of a miracle could this divine silence, broken only of Nature's voices, be defiled with the sound of the hated accents of the man who had ruined and betrayed her. Yes, she was weary, and a strange unaccustomed languor crept over her; she would rest there this night also.

So they went back to the hut, and made ready their evening meal, and as she fried the fish over the fire of peats, verily Lysbeth found herself laughing like a girl again. Then they ate it with appetite, and after it was done, Mother Martha prayed aloud; yes, and without fear, although she knew Lysbeth to be a Catholic, read from her one treasure, a Testament, crouching there in the light of the fire and saying:

"See, lady, what a place this is for a heretic to bide in. Where else may a woman read from the Bible and fear no spy or priest?" Remembering a certain story, Lysbeth shivered at her words.

"Now," said the Mare, when she had finished reading, "tell me before you sleep, what it was that brought you into the waters of the Haarlemer Mere, and what that Spanish man has done to you. Do not be afraid, for though I am mad, or so they say, I can keep counsel, and between you and me are many bonds, Carolus van Hout's daughter, some of which you know and see, and some that you can neither know nor see, but which God will weave in His own season."

Lysbeth looked at the weird countenance, distorted and made unhuman by long torment of body and mind, and found in it something to trust; yes, even signs of that sympathy which she so sorely needed. So she told her all the tale from the first word of it to the last.

The Mare listened in silence, for no story of evil perpetrated by a Spaniard seemed to move or astonish her, only when Lysbeth had done, she said :

"Ah! child, had you but known of me, and where to find me, you should have asked my aid."

"Why, mother, what could you have done?" answered Lysbeth.

"Done? I would have followed him by night until I found my chance in some lonely place, and there I would have——" Then she stretched out her bony hand to the red light of the fire, and Lysbeth saw that in it was a knife.

She sank back aghast.

"Why are you frightened, my pretty lady?" asked the Mare. "I tell you that I live on for only one thing—to kill Spaniards, yes, priests first and then the others. Oh! I have a long count to pay ; for every time that he was tortured a life, for every groan he uttered at the stake a life ; yes, so many for the father and half as many for the son. Well, I shall live to be old, I know that I shall live to be old, and the count will be discharged, ay, to the last stiver."

As she spoke, the outlawed Water Wife had risen, and the flare of the fire struck full upon her. It was an awful face that Lysbeth beheld by the light of it, full of fierceness and energy, the face of an inspired avenger, dread and unnatural, yet not altogether repulsive. Indeed, that countenance was such as an imaginative artist might give to one of the beasts in the Book of Revelation. Amazed and terrified, Lysbeth said nothing.

"I frighten you, gentle one," went on the Mare, "you who, although you have suffered, are still full of the milk of human kindness. Wait, woman, wait till they have murdered the man you love, till your heart is like my heart, and you also live on, not for love's sake, not for life's sake, but to be a Sword, a Sword, a Sword in the hand of God!"

"Cease, I pray you," said Lysbeth in a low voice; "I am faint, I am ill."

Ill she was indeed, and before morning there, in that lonely hovel on the island of the mere, a son was born to her.

When she was strong enough her nurse spoke:

"Will you keep the brat, or shall I kill it?" she asked.

"How can I kill my child?" said Lysbeth.

"It is the Spaniard's child also, and remember the curse you told me of, your own curse uttered on this thing before ever you were married? If it lives that curse shall cling to it, and through it you, too, shall be accursed. Best let me kill it and have done."

"How can I kill my own child? Touch it not," answered Lysbeth sullenly.

So the black-eyed boy lived and throve.

Somewhat slowly, lying there in the island hut, Lysbeth won back her strength. The Mare, or Mother Martha, as Lysbeth had now learned to call her, tended her as few midwives would have done. Food, too, she had in plenty, for Martha snared the fowl and caught the fish, or she made visits to the mainland and thence brought eggs and milk and flesh, which, so she said, the boors of that country gave her as much as she wanted of them. Also, to while away the hours, she would read to her out of the Testament, and from that reading Lysbeth learnt many things which until then she had not known. Indeed, before it was done with—Catholic though she was—she began to wonder in what lay the wickedness of these heretics, and how it came about that they were worthy of death and torment, since, sooth to say, in this Book she could find no law to which their lives and doctrine seemed to give offence.

Thus it happened that Martha, the fierce, half-crazy

water-dweller, sowed the seed in Lysbeth's heart that was to bear fruit in due season.

When three weeks had gone by and Lysbeth was on her feet again, though as yet scarcely strong enough to travel, Martha told her that she had business which would keep her from home a night, but what the business was she refused to say. Accordingly on a certain afternoon, having left good store of all things to Lysbeth's hand, the Mare departed in her skiff, nor did she return till after midday on the morrow. Now Lysbeth talked of leaving the island, but Martha would not suffer it, saying that if she desired to go she must swim, and indeed when Lysbeth went to look she found that the boat had been hidden elsewhere. So, nothing loth, she stayed on, and in the crisp autumn air her health and beauty came back to her, till she was once more much as she had been before the day when she went sledging with Juan de Montalvo.

On a November morning, leaving her infant in the hut with Martha, who had sworn to her on the Bible that she would not harm it, Lysbeth walked to the extremity of the island. During the night the first sharp frost of late autumn had fallen, making a thin film of ice upon the surface of the lake, which melted rapidly as the sun grew high. The air too was very clear and calm, and among the reeds, now turning golden at their tips, the finches flew and chirped, forgetful that winter was at hand. So sweet and peaceful was the scene that Lysbeth, also forgetful of many things, surveyed it with a kind of rapture. She knew not why, but her heart was happy that morning; it was as though a dark cloud had passed from her life; as though the blue skies of peace and joy were spread about her. Doubtless other clouds might appear upon the horizon; doubtless in their season they would appear, but she felt that this horizon was as yet a long way off, and meanwhile above her bent the tender sky, serene and sweet and happy.

Upon the crisp grass behind her suddenly she heard a footfall, a new footfall, not that of the long, stealthy stride of Martha, who was called the Mare, and swung round upon her heel to meet it.

Oh, God! Who was this? Oh, God! there before her stood Dirk van Goorl. Dirk, and no other than Dirk, unless she dreamed, Dirk with his kind face wreathed in a happy smile, Dirk with his arms outstretched towards her. Lysbeth said nothing, she could not speak, only she stood still gazing, gazing, gazing, and always he came on, till now his arms were round her. Then she sprang back.

"Do not touch me," she cried, "remember what I am and why I stay here."

"I know well what you are, Lysbeth," he answered slowly; "you are the holiest and purest woman who ever walked this earth; you are an angel upon this earth; you are the woman who gave her honour to save the man she loved. Oh! be silent, be silent, I have heard the story; I know it every word, and here I kneel before you, and, next to my God, I worship you, Lysbeth, I worship you."

"But the child," she murmured, "it lives, and it is mine and the man's."

Dirk's face hardened a little, but he only answered:

"We must bear our burdens; you have borne yours, I must bear mine," and he seized her hands and kissed them, yes, and the hem of her garment and kissed it also.

So these two plighted their troth.

Afterwards Lysbeth heard all the story. Montalvo had been put upon his trial, and, as it chanced, things went hard with him. Among his judges one was a great Netherlander lord, who desired to uphold the rights of his countrymen; one was a high ecclesiastic, who was furious because of the fraud that had been played upon the Church, which had been trapped into celebrating a bigamous marriage; and a

third was a Spanish grandee, who, as it happened, knew the family of the first wife who had been deserted.

Therefore, for the luckless Montalvo, when the case had been proved to the hilt against him by the evidence of the priest who brought the letter, of the wife's letters, and of the truculent Black Meg, who now found an opportunity of paying back "hot water for cold," there was little mercy. His character was bad, and it was said, moreover, that because of his cruelties and the shame she had suffered at his hands, Lysbeth van Hout had committed suicide. At least, this was certain, that she was seen running at night towards the Haarlemer Mere, and that after this, search as her friends would, nothing more could be heard of her.

So, that an example might be made, although he writhed and fenced his best, the noble captain, Count Juan de Montalvo, was sent to serve for fourteen years in the galleys as a common slave. And there, for the while, was an end of him.

There also was an end of the strange and tragic courtship of Dirk van Goorl and Lysbeth van Hout.

Six months afterwards they were married, and by Dirk's wish took the child, who was christened Adrian, to live with them. A few months later Lysbeth entered the community of the New Religion, and less than two years after her marriage a son was born to her, the hero of this story, who was named Foy.

As it happened, she bore no other children.



Book the Second

THE RIPENING



Book the Second

THE RIPENING

CHAPTER IX

ADRIAN, FOY, AND MARTIN THE RED

MANY years had gone by since Lysbeth found her love again upon the island in the Haarlemer Mere. The son that she bore there was now a grown man, as was her second son, Foy, and her own hair showed grey beneath the lappets of her cap.

Fast, fast wove the loom of God during those fateful years, and the web thereof was the story of a people's agony and its woof was dyed red with their blood. Edict had followed edict, crime had been heaped upon crime. Alva, like some inhuman and incarnate vengeance, had marched his army, quiet and harmless as is the tiger when he stalks his prey, across the fields of France. Now he was at Brussels, and already the heads of the Counts Egmont and Hoorn had fallen; already the Blood Council was established and at its work. In the Low Countries law had ceased to exist, and there anything might happen however monstrous or inhuman. Indeed, with one decree of the Holy Office, confirmed by a proclamation of Philip of Spain, all the inhabitants of the Netherlands, three millions of them, had been condemned to death. Men's minds were full of terror, for on every side were burnings and hangings and torturings. Without were fightings, within were fears, and none knew whom they could trust, since

the friend of to-day might be the informer or judge of to-morrow. All this because they chose to worship God in their own fashion unaided by images and priests.

Although so long a time had passed, as it chanced those personages with whom we have already made acquaintance in this history were still alive. Let us begin with two of them, one of whom we know and one of whom, although we have heard of him before, will require some introduction —Dirk van Goorl and his son Foy.

Scene—an upper room above a warehouse overlooking the market-place of Leyden, a room with small windows and approached by two staircases; time, a summer twilight. The faint light which penetrated into this chamber through the unshuttered windows, for to curtain them would have been to excite suspicion, showed that about twenty people had gathered there, among whom were one or two women. For the most part they were men of the better class, middle-aged burghers of sober mien, some of whom stood about in knots, while others were seated upon stools and benches. At the end of the room addressing them was a man well on in middle life, with grizzled hair and beard, small and somewhat mean of stature, yet one through whose poor exterior goodness seemed to flow like light through some rough casement of horn. This was Jan Arentz, the famous preacher, by trade a basket-maker, a man who showed himself steadfast to the New Religion through all afflictions, and who was gifted with a spirit which could remain unmoved amidst the horrors of perhaps the most terrible persecution that Christians have suffered since the days of the Roman Emperors. He was preaching now and these people were his congregation.

"I came not to bring peace but a sword," was his text, and certainly this night it was most appropriate and one

easy of illustration. For there, on the very market-place beneath them, guarded by soldiers and surrounded with the rabble of the city, two members of his flock, men who a fortnight before had worshipped in that same room, at this moment were undergoing martyrdom by fire!

Arentz preached patience and fortitude. He went back into recent history and told his hearers how he himself had passed a hundred dangers; how he had been hunted like a wolf, how he had been tried, how he had escaped from prisons and from the swords of soldiers, even as St. Paul had done before him, and how yet he lived to minister to them this night. He told them that they must have no fear, that they must go on quite happy, quite confident, taking what it pleased God to send them, feeling that it would all be for the best; yes, that even the worst would be for the best. What was the worst? Some hours of torment and death. And what lay beyond the death? Ah! let them think of that. The whole world was but a brief and varying shadow, what did it matter how or when they walked out of that shadow into the perfect light? The sky was very black, but behind it the sun shone. They must look forward with the eye of faith; perhaps the sufferings of the present generation were part of the scheme of things; perhaps from the earth which they watered with their blood would spring the flower of freedom, that glorious freedom in whose day all men would be able to worship their Creator responsible only to the Bible law and their own consciences, not to the dogmas or doctrines of other men.

As Arentz spoke thus, eloquently, sweetly, spoke like one inspired, the twilight deepened and the flare of those sacrificial fires flickered on the window pane, and the mixed murmurs of the crowd of witnesses broke upon his listeners' ears. The preacher paused and looked down upon the

dreadful scene below, for from where he stood he could behold it all.

"Mark is dead," he said, "and our dear brother, Andreas Jansen, is dying; the executioners heap the faggots round him. You think it cruel, you think it piteous, but I say to you, No. I say that it is a holy and a glorious sight, for we witness the passing of souls to bliss. Brethren, let us pray for him who leaves us, and for ourselves who stay behind. Yes, and let us pray for those who slay him that know not what they do. We watch his sufferings, but I tell you that Christ his Lord watches also; Christ who hung upon the Cross, the victim of such men as these. He stands with him in the fire, His hand compasses him, His voice supports him. Brethren, let us pray."

Then at his bidding every member of that little congregation knelt in prayer for the passing spirit of Andreas Jansen.

Again Arentz looked through the window.

"He dies!" he cried; "a soldier has thrust him through with a pike in mercy, his head falls forward. Oh! God, if it be Thy will, grant to us a sign."

Some strange breath passed through that upper chamber, a cold breath which blew upon the brows of the worshippers and stirred their hair, bringing with it a sense of the presence of Andreas Jansen, the martyr. Then, there upon the wall opposite to the window, at the very spot where their brother and companion, Andreas, saint and martyr, was wont to kneel, appeared the sign, or what they took to be a sign. Yes, there upon the whitewashed wall, reflected, mayhap, from the fires below, and showing clearly in the darkened room, shone the vision of a fiery cross. For a second it was seen. Then it was gone, but to every soul in this room the vision of that cross had brought its message; to each a separate message, an individual inspiration, for in the light of it they read strange

lessons of life and death. The cross vanished and there was silence.

"Brethren," said the voice of Arentz, speaking in the darkness, "you have seen. Through the fire and through the shadow, follow the Cross and fear not."

The service was over, and below in the emptied market-place the executioners collected the poor calcined fragments of the martyrs to cast them with contumely and filthy jests into the darkling waters of the river. Now, one by one and two by two, the worshippers slipped away through some hidden door opening on an alley. Let us look at three of their number as they crept through bye streets back to a house on the Bree Straat with which we are acquainted, two of them walking in front and one behind.

The pair were Dirk van Goorl and his son Foy—there was no mistaking their relationship. Save that he had grown somewhat portly and thoughtful, Dirk was the Dirk of five and twenty years ago, thickset, grey-eyed, bearded, a handsome man according to the Dutch standard, whose massive, kindly countenance betrayed the massive, kindly mind within. Very like him was his son Foy, only his eyes were blue instead of grey, and his hair was yellow. Though they seemed sad enough just now, these were merry and pleasant eyes, and the round, the somewhat childlike face was merry also, the face of a person who looked upon the bright side of things.

There was nothing remarkable or distinguished about Foy's appearance, but from it the observer, who met him for the first time, received an impression of energy, honesty, and good-nature. In truth, such were apt to set him down as a sailor-man, who had just returned from a long journey, in the course of which he had come to the conclusion that this world was a pleasant place, and one well worth exploring. As Foy walked down the street with his quick

and nautical gait, it was evident that even the solemn and dreadful scene which he had just experienced had not altogether quenched his cheery and hopeful spirit. Yet of all those who listened to the exhortation of the saint-like Arentz, none had laid its burden of faith and carelessness for the future to heart more entirely than Foy van Goorl.

But of this power of looking on the bright side of things the credit must be given to his nature and not to his piety, for Foy could not be sad for long. *Dum spiro, spero* would have been his motto had he known Latin, and he did not mean to grow sorrowful—over the prospect of being burnt, for instance—until he found himself fast to the stake. It was this quality of good spirits in a depressing and melancholy age that made of Foy so extraordinarily popular a character.

Behind these two followed a much more remarkable-looking personage, the Frisian, Martin Roos, or Red Martin, so named from his hair, which was red to the verge of flame colour, and his beard of a like hue that hung almost to his breast. There was no other such beard in Leyden; indeed the boys, taking advantage of his good-nature, would call to him as he passed, asking him if it was true that the storks nested in it every spring. This strange-looking man, who was now perhaps a person of forty years of age, for ten years or more had been the faithful servant of Dirk van Goorl, whose house he had entered under circumstances which shall be told of in their place.

Any one glancing at Martin casually would not have said that he was a giant, and yet his height was considerable; to be accurate, when he stood upright, something over six feet three inches. The reason why he did not appear to be tall was that in truth his great bulk shortened him to the eye, and also because he carried himself ill, more from a desire to conceal his size than for any other reason. It was in girth of chest and limb that Martin was really remark-

able, so much so that a short-armed man standing before him could not make his fingers touch behind his back. His face was fair as a girl's, and almost as flat as a full moon, for of nose he had little. Nature, indeed, had furnished him with one of ordinary, if not excessive size, but certain incidents in Martin's early career, which in our day would be designated as that of a prize-fighter, had caused it to spread about his countenance in an interesting and curious fashion. His eyebrows, however, remained prominent. Beneath them appeared a pair of very large, round, and rather mild blue eyes, covered with thick white lids absolutely devoid of lashes, which eyes had a most unholy trick of occasionally taking fire when their owner was irritated. Then they could burn and blaze like lamps tied to a barge on a dark night, with an effect that was all the more alarming because the rest of his countenance remained absolutely impassive.

Suddenly while this little company went homewards a sound arose in the quiet street as of people running. Instantly all three of them pressed themselves into the doorway of a house and crouched down. Martin lifted his ear and listened.

"Three people," he whispered; "a woman who flies and two men who follow."

At that moment a casement was thrown open forty paces or so away, and a hand, bearing a torch, thrust out of it. By its light they saw the pale face of a lady speeding towards them, and after her two Spanish soldiers.

"The Vrouw Andreas Jansen," whispered Martin again, "flying from two of the guard who burned her husband."

The torch was withdrawn and the casement shut with a snap. In those days quiet burghers could not afford to be mixed up in street troubles, especially if soldiers had to do with them. Once more the place was empty and quiet, except for the sound of running feet.

Opposite to the doorway the lady was overtaken. "Oh! let me go," she sobbed, "oh! let me go. Is it not enough that you have killed my husband? Why must I be hunted from my house thus?"

"Because you are so pretty, my dear," answered one of the brutes, "also you are rich. Catch hold of her, friend. Lord! how she kicks."

Foy made a motion as though to start out of the doorway, but Martin pressed him back with the flat of his hand, without apparent effort, and yet so strongly that the young man could not move.

"My business, masters," he muttered; "you would make a noise," and they heard his breath come thick.

Now, moving with curious stealthiness for one of so great a bulk, Martin was out of the porch. By the summer starlight the watchers could see that, before they had caught sight of, or even heard, him, he had gripped the two soldiers, small men, like most Spaniards, by the napes of their necks, one in either hand, and was grinding their faces together. This, indeed, was evident, for his great shoulders worked visibly and their breastplates clicked as they touched. But the men themselves made no sound at all. Then Martin seemed to catch them round the middle, and behold! in another second the pair of them had gone headlong into the canal, which ran down the centre of the street.

"My God! he has killed them," muttered Dirk.

"And a good job, too, father," said Foy, "only I wish that I had shared in it."

Martin's great form loomed in the doorway. "The Vrouw Jansen has fled away," he said, "and the street is quite quiet now, so I think that we had better be moving before any see us, my masters."

Some days later the bodies of these Spanish soldiers were found with their faces smashed flat. It was suggested in explanation of this plight, that they had got drunk and



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while fighting together had fallen from the bridge on to the stonework of a pier. This version of their end found a ready acceptance, as it consorted well with the reputations of the men. So there was no search or inquiry.

"I had to finish the dogs," Martin explained apologetically—"may the Lord Jesus forgive me—because I was afraid that they might know me again by my beard."

"Alas! alas!" groaned Dirk, "what times are these. Say nothing of this dreadful matter to your mother, son, or to Adrian either." But Foy nudged Martin in the ribs and muttered, "Well done, old fellow, well done!"

After this experience, which the reader must remember was nothing extraordinary in those dark and dreadful days when neither the lives of men nor the safety of women—especially Protestant men and women—were things of much account, the three of them reached home without further incident, and quite unobserved. Arriving at the house, they entered it near the Watergate by a back door that led into the stableyard. It was opened by a woman whom they followed into a little room where a light burned. Here she turned and kissed two of them, Dirk first and then Foy.

"Thank God that I see you safe," she said. "Whenever you go to the Meeting-place I tremble until I hear your footsteps at the door."

"What's the use of that, mother?" said Foy. "Your fretting yourself won't make things better or worse."

"Ah! dear, how can I help it?" she replied softly; "we cannot all be young and cheerful, you know."

"True, wife, true," broke in Dirk, "though I wish we could; we should be lighter-hearted so," and he looked at her and sighed.

Lysbeth van Goorl could no longer boast the beauty which was hers when first we met her, but she was still a sweet and graceful woman, her figure remaining almost as

slim as it had been in girlhood. The grey eyes also retained their depth and fire, only the face was worn, though more by care and the burden of memories than with years. The lot of the loving wife and mother was hard indeed when Philip the King ruled in Spain and Alva was his prophet in the Netherlands.

"Is it done?" she asked.

"Yes, wife, our brethren are now saints in Paradise, therefore rejoice."

"It is very wrong," she answered with a sob, "but I cannot. Oh!" she added with a sudden blaze of indignation, "if He is just and good, why does God suffer His servants to be killed thus?"

"Perhaps our grandchildren will be able to answer that question," replied Dirk.

"That poor Vrouw Jansen," broke in Lysbeth, "just married, and so young and pretty. I wonder what will become of her."

Dirk and Foy looked at each other, and Martin, who was hovering about near the door, slunk back guiltily into the passage as though *he* had attempted to injure the Vrouw Jansen.

"To-morrow we will look to it, wife. And now let us eat, for we are faint with hunger."

Ten minutes later they were seated at their meal. The reader may remember the room; it was that wherein Montalvo, ex-count and captain, made the speech which charmed all hearers on the night when he had lost the race at the ice-carnival. The same chandelier hung above them, some portion of the same plate, even, repurchased by Dirk, was on the table, but how different were the company and the feast! Aunt Clara, the fatuous, was long dead, and with her many of the companions of that occasion, some naturally, some by the hand of the executioner, while others had fled the land. Pieter van de Werff still lived, however,

and though regarded with suspicion by the authorities, was a man of weight and honour in the town, but to-night he was not present there. The food, too, if ample was plain, not on account of the poverty of the household, for Dirk had prospered in his worldly affairs, being hard-working and skilful, and the head of the brass foundry to which in those early days he was apprenticed, but because in such times people thought little of the refinements of eating. When life itself is so doubtful, its pleasures and amusements become of small importance. The ample waiting service of the maid Greta, who long ago had vanished none knew where, and her fellow domestics was now carried on by the man, Martin, and one old woman, since, as every menial might be a spy, even the richest employed few of them. In short all the lighter and more cheerful parts of life were in abeyance.

"Where is Adrian?" asked Dirk.

"I do not know," answered Lysbeth. "I thought that perhaps——"

"No," replied her husband hastily; "he did not accompany us; he rarely does."

"Brother Adrian likes to look underneath the spoon before he licks it," said Foy with his mouth full.

The remark was enigmatic, but his parents seemed to understand what Foy meant; at least it was followed by an uncomfortable and acquiescent silence. Just then Adrian came in, and as we have not seen him since, some four and twenty years ago, he made his entry into the world on the secret island in the Haarlemer Mere, here it may be as well to describe his appearance.

He was a handsome young man, but of quite a different stamp to his half-brother, Foy, being tall, slight, and very graceful in figure; advantages which he had inherited from his mother Lysbeth. In countenance, however, he differed from her so much that none would have guessed him to be

her son. Indeed, Adrian's face was pure Spanish, there was nothing of a Netherlander about his dark beauty. Spanish were the eyes of velvet black, set rather close together, Spanish also the finely chiselled features and the thin, spreading nostrils, Spanish the cold, yet somewhat sensual mouth, more apt to sneer than smile; the straight, black hair, the clear, olive skin, and that indifferent, half-wearied mien which became its wearer well enough, but in a man of his years of Northern blood would have seemed unnatural or affected.

He took his seat without speaking, nor did the others speak to him till his stepfather Dirk said:

"You were not at the works to-day, Adrian, although we should have been glad of your help in founding the culverin."

"No, father"—he called him father—answered the young man in a measured and rather melodious voice. "You see we don't quite know who is going to pay for that piece. Or at any rate I don't quite know, as nobody seems to take me into confidence, and if it should chance to be the losing side, well, it might be enough to hang me."

Dirk flushed up, but made no answer, only Foy remarked:

"That's right, Adrian, look after your own skin."

"Just now I find it more interesting," went on Adrian loftily and disregardful of his brother, "to study those whom the cannon may shoot than to make the cannon which is to shoot them."

"Hope you won't be one of them," interrupted Foy again.

"Where have you been this evening, son?" said Lysbeth hastily, fearing a quarrel.

"I have been mixing with the people, mother, at the scene on the market-place yonder."

"Not the martyrdom of our good friend, Jansen, surely?"

"Yes, mother, why not? It is terrible, it is a crime, no doubt, but the observer of life should study these things. There is nothing more fascinating to the philosopher than the play of human passions. The emotions of the brutal crowd, the stolid indifference of the guard, the grief of the sympathisers, the stoical endurance of the victims animated by religious exaltation——"

"And the beautiful logic of the philosopher, with his nose in the air, while he watches his friend and brother in the Faith being slowly burnt to death," broke out Foy with passion.

"Hush! hush!" said Dirk, striking his fist upon the table with a blow that caused the glasses to ring, "this is no subject for word-chopping. Adrian, you would have been better with us than down below at that butchery, even though you were less safe," he added, with meaning. "But I wish to run none into danger, and you are of an age to judge for yourself. I beg you, however, to spare us your light talk about scenes that we think dreadful, however interesting you may have found them."

Adrian shrugged his shoulders and called to Martin to bring him some more meat. As the great man approached him he spread out his fine-drawn nostrils and sniffed.

"You smell, Martin," he said, "and no wonder. Look, there is blood upon your jerkin. Have you been killing pigs and forgotten to change it?"

Martin's round blue eyes flashed, then went pale and dead again.

"Yes, master," he answered, in his thick voice, "I have been killing pigs. But your dress also smells of blood and fire; perhaps you went too near the stake." At that moment, to put an end to the conversation, Dirk rose and said grace. Then he went out of the room accompanied by

his wife and Foy, leaving Adrian to finish his meal alone, which he did reflectively and at leisure.

When he left the eating chamber Foy followed Martin across the courtyard to the walled-in stables, and up a ladder to the room where the serving man slept. It was a queer place, and filled with an extraordinary collection of odds and ends ; the skins of birds, otters, and wolves ; weapons of different makes, notably a very large two-handed sword, plain and old-fashioned, but of excellent steel ; bits of harness and other things.

There was no bed in this room for the reason that Martin disdained a bed, a few skins upon the floor being all that he needed to lie on. Nor did he ask for much covering, since so hardy was he by nature, that except in the very bitterest weather his woollen vest was enough for him. Indeed, he had been known to sleep out in it when the frost was so sharp that he rose with his hair and beard covered with icicles.

Martin shut the door and lit three lanterns, which he hung to hooks upon the wall.

"Are you ready for a turn, master?" he asked.

Foy nodded as he answered, "I want to get the taste of it all out of my mouth, so don't spare me. Lay on till I get angry, it will make me forget," and taking a leathern jerkin off a peg he pulled it over his head.

"Forget what, master?"

"Oh! the prayings and the burnings and Vrouw Jansen, and Adrian's sea-lawyer sort of talk."

"Ah, yes, that's the worst of them all for us," and the big man leant forward and whispered. "Keep an eye on him, Master Foy."

"What do you mean?" asked Foy sharply and flushing.

"What I say."

"You forget ; you are talking of my brother, my own mother's son. I will hear no harm of Adrian ; his ways

are different to ours, but he is good-hearted at bottom. Do you understand me, Martin?"

"But not your father's son, master. It's the sire sets the strain; I have bred horses, and I know."

Foy looked at him and hesitated.

"No," said Martin, answering the question in his eyes, "I have nothing against him, but he always sees the other side, and that's bad. Also he is Spanish——"

"And you don't like Spaniards," broke in Foy. "Martin, you are a pig-headed, prejudiced, unjust jackass."

Martin smiled. "No, master, I don't like Spaniards, nor will you before you have done with them. But then it is only fair as they don't like me."

"I say, Martin," said Foy, following a new line of thought, "how did you manage that business so quietly, and why didn't you let me do my share?"

"Because you'd have made a noise, master, and we didn't want the watch on us; also, being fully armed, they might have bettered you."

"Good reasons, Martin. How did you do it? I couldn't see much."

"It is a trick I learned up there in Friesland. Some of the Northmen sailors taught it me. There is a place in a man's neck, here at the back, and if he is squeezed there he loses his senses in a second. Thus, master—" and putting out his great hand he gripped Foy's neck in a fashion that caused him the intensest agony.

"Drop it," said Foy, kicking at his shins.

"I didn't squeeze; I was only showing you," answered Martin, opening his eyes. "Well, when their wits were gone of course it was easy to knock their heads together, so that they mightn't find them again. You see," he added, "if I had left them alive— well, they are dead anyway, and getting a hot supper by now, I expect. Which shall it be, master? Dutch stick or Spanish point?"

"Stick first, then point," answered Foy.

"Good. We need 'em both nowadays," and Martin reached down a pair of ash plants fitted into old sword hilts to protect the hands of the players.

They stood up to each other on guard, and then against the light of the lanterns it could be seen how huge a man was Martin. Foy, although well-built and sturdy, and like all his race of a stout habit, looked but a child beside the bulk of this great fellow. As for their stick game, which was in fact sword exercise, it is unnecessary to follow its details, for the end of it was what might almost have been expected. Foy sprang to and fro slashing and cutting, while Martin the solid scarcely moved his weapon. Then suddenly there would be a parry and a reach, and the stick would fall with a thud all down the length of Foy's back, causing the dust to start from his leathern jerkin.

"It's no good," said Foy at last, rubbing himself ruefully. "What's the use of guarding against you, you great brute, when you simply crash through my guard and hit me all the same? That isn't science."

"No, master," answered Martin, "but it is business. If we had been using swords you would have been in pieces by now. No blame to you and no credit to me; my reach is longer and my arm heavier, that is all."

"At any rate I am beaten," said Foy; "now take the rapiers and give me a chance."

Then they went at it with the thrusting-swords, rendered harmless by a disc of lead upon their points, and at this game the luck turned. Foy was active as a cat with the eye of a hawk, and twice he managed to get in under Martin's guard.

"You're dead, old fellow," he said at the second thrust.

"Yes, young master," answered Martin, "but remember that I killed you long ago, so that you are only a ghost and of no account. Although I have tried to learn its use to

please you, I don't mean to fight with a toasting fork. This is my weapon," and, seizing the great sword which stood in the corner, he made it hiss through the air.

Foy took it from his hand and looked at it. It was a long straight blade with a plain iron guard, or cage, for the hands, and on it, in old letters, was engraved one Latin word, *Silentium*, "Silence."

"Why is it called 'Silence,' Martin?"

"Because it makes people silent, I suppose, master."

"What is its history, and how did you come by it?" asked Foy in a malicious voice. He knew that the subject was a sore one with the huge Frisian.

Martin turned red as his own beard and looked uncomfortable. "I believe," he answered, staring upwards, "that it was the ancient Sword of Justice of a little place up in Friesland. As to how I came by it, well, I forget."

"And you call yourself a good Christian," said Foy reproachfully. "Now I have heard that your head was going to be chopped off with this sword, but that somehow you managed to steal it first and got away."

"There was something of the sort," mumbled Martin, "but it is so long ago that it slips my mind. I was so often in broils and drunk in those days—may the dear Lord forgive me—that I can't quite remember things. And now, by your leave, I want to go to sleep."

"You old liar," said Foy shaking his head at him, "you killed that poor executioner and made off with his sword. You know you did, and now you are ashamed to own the truth."

"May be, may be," answered Martin vacuously; "so many things happen in the world that a fool man cannot remember them all. I want to go to sleep."

"Martin," said Foy, sitting down upon a stool and dragging off his leather jerkin, "what used you to do before

you turned holy? You have never told me all the story. Come now, speak up. I won't tell Adrian."

"Nothing worth mentioning, Master Foy."

"Out with it, Martin."

"Well, if you wish to know, I am the son of a Friesland boor."

"— And an Englishwoman from Yarmouth: I know all that."

"Yes," repeated Martin, "an Englishwoman from Yarmouth. She was very strong, my mother; she could hold up a cart on her shoulders while my father greased the wheels, that is for a bet; otherwise she used to make my father hold the cart up while *she* greased the wheels. Folk would come to see her do the trick. When I grew up I held the cart and they both greased the wheels. But at last they died of the plague, the pair of them, God rest their souls! So I inherited the farm——"

"And—" said Foy, fixing him with his eye.

"And," jerked out Martin in an unwilling fashion, "fell into bad habits."

"Drink?" suggested the merciless Foy.

Martin sighed and hung his great head. He had a tender conscience.

"Then you took to prize-fighting," went on his tormentor; "you can't deny it; look at your nose."

"I did, master, for the Lord hadn't touched my heart in those days, and," he added, brisking up, "it wasn't such a bad trade, for nobody ever beat me except a Brussels man once when I was drunk. He broke my nose, but afterwards, when I was sober—" and he stopped.

"You killed the Spanish boxer here in Leyden," said Foy sternly.

"Yes," echoed Martin, "I killed him sure enough, but —oh! it was a pretty fight, and he brought it on himself. He was a fine man, that Spaniard, but the devil wouldn't

play fair, so I just had to kill him. I hope that they bear in mind up above that I *had* to kill him."

"Tell me about it, Martin, for I was at The Hague at the time, and can't remember. Of course I don't approve of such things"—and the young rascal clasped his hands and looked pious—"but as it is all done with, one may as well hear the story of the fight. To spin it won't make you more wicked than you are."

Then suddenly Martin the unreminiscent developed a marvellous memory, and with much wealth of detail set out the exact circumstances of that historic encounter.

"And after he had kicked me in the stomach," he ended, "which, master, you will know he had no right to do, I lost my temper and hit out with all my strength, having first feinted and knocked up his guard with my left arm——"

"And then," said Foy, growing excited, for Martin really told the story very well, "what happened?"

"Oh, his head went back between his shoulders, and when they picked him up, his neck was broken. I was sorry, but I couldn't help it, the Lord knows I couldn't help it; he shouldn't have called me 'a dirty Frisian ox' and kicked me in the stomach."

"No, that was very wrong of him. But they arrested you, didn't they, Martin?"

"Yes, for the second time they condemned me to death as a brawler and a manslayer. You see, the other Friesland business came up against me, and the magistrates here had money on the Spaniard. Then your dear father saved me. He was burgomaster of that year, and he paid the death fine for me—a large sum—afterwards, too, he taught me to be sober and think of my soul. So you know why Red Martin will serve him and his while there is a drop of blood left in his worthless carcase. And now, Master Foy, I'm going to sleep, and God grant that those dirty Spanish dogs mayn't haunt me."

"Don't you fear for that, Martin," said Foy as he took his departure, "*absolvo te* for those Spaniards. Through your strength God smote them who were not ashamed to rob and insult a poor new widowed woman after helping to murder her husband. Yes, Martin, you may enter that on the right side of the ledger—for a change—for they won't haunt you at night. I'm more afraid lest the business should be traced home to us, but I don't think it likely since the street was quite empty."

"Quite empty," echoed Martin nodding his head. "Nobody saw me except the two soldiers and Vrouw Jansen. They can't tell, and I'm sure that she won't. Good-night, my young master."

CHAPTER X

ADRIAN GOES OUT HAWKING

In a house down a back street not very far from the Leyden prison, a man and a woman sat at breakfast on the morning following the burning of the Heer Jansen and his fellow martyr. These also we have met before, for they were none other than the estimable Black Meg and her companion, named the Butcher. Time, which had left them both strong and active, had not, it must be admitted, improved their personal appearance. Black Meg, indeed, was much as she had always been, except that her hair was now grey and her features, which seemed to be covered with yellow parchment, had become sharp and haglike, though her dark eyes still burned with their ancient fire. The man, Hague Simon, or the Butcher, scoundrel by nature and spy and thief by trade, one of the evil spawn of an age of violence and cruelty, boasted a face and form that became his reputation well. His countenance was villainous, very fat and flabby, with small, pig-like eyes, and framed, as it were, in a fringe of sandy-coloured whiskers, running from the throat to the temple, where they faded away into a great expanse of utterly bald head. The figure beneath was heavy, pot-paunched, and supported upon a pair of bowed but sturdy legs.

But if they were no longer young, and such good looks as they ever possessed had vanished, the years had brought them certain compensations. Indeed, it was a period in which spies and all such wretches flourished, since, besides other pickings, by special enactment a good proportion of the realized estates of heretics was paid over to the inform-

ers as blood-money. Of course, however, humble tools like the Butcher and his wife did not get the largest joints of the heretic sheep, for whenever one was slaughtered, there were always many honest middlemen of various degree to be satisfied, from the judge down to the executioner, with others who never showed their faces.

Still, when the burnings and torturings were brisk, the amount totalled up very handsomely. Thus, as the pair sat at their meal this morning, they were engaged in figuring out what they might expect to receive from the estate of the late Heer Jansen, or at least Black Meg was so employed with the help of a deal board and a bit of chalk. At last she announced the result, which was satisfactory. Simon held up his fat hands in admiration.

"Clever little dove," he said, "you ought to have been a lawyer's wife with your head for figures. Ah! it grows near, it grows near."

"What grows near, you fool?" asked Meg in her deep mannish voice.

"That farm with an inn attached of which I dream, standing in rich pasture land with a little wood behind it, and in the wood a church. Not too large; no, I am not ambitious; let us say a hundred acres, enough to keep thirty or forty cows, which you would milk while I marketed the butter and the cheeses——"

"And slit the throats of the guests," interpolated Meg.

Simon looked shocked. "No, wife, you misjudge me. It is a rough world, and we must take queer cuts to fortune, but once I get there, respectability for me and a seat in the village church, provided, of course, that it is orthodox. I know that you come of the people, and your instincts are of the people, but I can never forget that my grandfather was a gentleman," and Simon puffed himself out and looked at the ceiling.

"Indeed," sneered Meg, "and what was your grand-

mother, or, for the matter of that, how do you know who was your grandfather? Country house! The old Red Mill, where you hide goods out there in the swamp, is likely to be your only country house. Village church? Village gallows more likely. No, don't you look nasty at me, for I won't stand it, you dirty little liar. I have done things, I know; but I wouldn't have got my own aunt burned for an Anabaptist, which she wasn't, in order to earn twenty florins, so there."

Simon turned purple with rage; that aunt story was one which touched him on the raw. "Ugly——" he began.

Instantly Meg's hand shot out and grasped the neck of a bottle, whereon he changed his tune.

"The sex, the sex!" he murmured, turning aside to mop his bald head with a napkin; "well, it's only their pretty way, they will have their little joke. Hullo, there is someone knocking at the door."

"And mind how you open it," said Meg, becoming alert. "Remember we have plenty of enemies, and a pike blade comes through a small crack."

"Can you live with the wise and remain a greenhorn? Trust me." And placing his arm about his spouse's waist, Simon stood on tiptoe and kissed her gently on the cheek in token of reconciliation, for Meg had a nasty memory in quarrels. Then he skipped away towards the door as fast as his bandy legs would carry him.

The colloquy there was long and for the most part carried on through the keyhole, but in the end their visitor was admitted, a beetle-browed brute of much the same stamp as his host.

"You are nice ones," he said sulkily, "to be so suspicious about an old friend, especially when he comes on a job."

"Don't be angry, dear Hans," interrupted Simon in a pleading voice. "You know how many bad characters

are abroad in these rough times; why, for aught we could tell, you might have been one of these desperate Lutherans, who stick at nothing. But about the business?"

"Lutherans, indeed," snarled Hans: "well, if they are wise they'd stick at your fat stomach; but it is a Lutheran job that I have come from The Hague to talk about."

"Ah!" said Meg, "who sent you?"

"A Spaniard named Ramiro, who has recently turned up there, a humorous dog connected with the Inquisition, who seems to know everybody and whom nobody knows. However, his money is right enough, and no doubt he has authority behind him. He says that you are old friends of his."

"Ramiro? Ramiro?" repeated Meg reflectively, "that means Oarsman, doesn't it, and sounds like an alias? Well, I've lots of acquaintances in the galleys, and he may be one of them. What does he want, and what are the terms?"

Hans leant forward and whispered for a long while. The other two listened in silence, only nodding from time to time.

"It doesn't seem much for the job," said Simon when Hans had finished.

"Well, friend, it is easy and safe; a fat merchant and his wife and a young girl. Mind you, there is no killing to be done if we can help it, and if we can't help it the Holy Office will shield us. Also it is only the letter which he thinks that the young woman may carry that the noble Ramiro wants. Doubtless it has to do with the sacred affairs of the Church. Any valuables about them we may keep as a perquisite over and above the pay."

Simon hesitated, but Meg announced with decision,

"It is good enough; these merchant women generally have jewels hidden in their stays."

"My dear," interrupted Simon.

"Don't 'my dear' me," said Meg fiercely. "I have

made up my mind, so there's an end. We meet by the Boshhuysen at five o'clock at the big oak in the copse, where we will settle the details."

After this Simon said no more, for he had this virtue, so useful in domestic life—he knew when to yield.

On this same morning Adrian rose late. The talk at the supper table on the previous night, especially Foy's coarse, uneducated sarcasm, had ruffled his temper, and when Adrian's temper was ruffled he generally found it necessary to sleep himself into good humour. As the bookkeeper of the establishment, for his stepfather had never been able to induce him to take an active part in its work, which in his heart he considered beneath him, Adrian should have been in the office by nine o'clock. Not having risen before ten, however, nor eaten his breakfast until after eleven, this was clearly impossible. Then he remembered that here was a good chance of finishing a sonnet, of which the last lines were running in his head. It chanced that Adrian was a bit of a poet, and, like most poets, he found quiet essential to the art of composition. Somehow, when Foy was in the house, singing and talking, and that great Frisian brute, Martin, was tramping to and fro, there was never any quiet, for even when he could not hear them, the sense of their presence exasperated his nerves. So now was his opportunity, especially as his mother was out—marketing, she said—but in all probability engaged upon some wretched and risky business connected with the people whom she called martyrs. Adrian determined to avail himself of it and finish his sonnet.

This took some time. First, as all true artists know, the Muse must be summoned, and she will rarely arrive under an hour's appropriate and gloomy contemplation of things in general. Then, especially in the case of sonnets, rhymes, which are stubborn and remorseless things, must

be found and arranged. The pivot and object of this particular poem was a certain notable Spanish beauty, Isabella d'Ovanda by name. She was the wife of a decrepit but exceedingly noble Spaniard, who might almost have been her grandfather, and who had been sent as one of a commission appointed by King Philip II. to inquire into certain financial matters connected with the Netherlands.

This grandee, who, as it happened, was a very industrious and conscientious person, among other cities, had visited Leyden in order to assess the value of the Imperial dues and taxes. The task did not take him long, because the burghers rudely and vehemently declared that under their ancient charter they were free from any Imperial dues or taxes whatsoever, nor could the noble marquis's arguments move them to a more rational view. Still, he argued for a week, and during that time his wife, the lovely Isabella, dazzled the women of the town with her costumes and the men with her exceedingly attractive person.

Especially did she dazzle the romantic Adrian; hence the poetry. On the whole the rhymes went pretty well, though there were difficulties, but with industry he got round them. Finally the sonnet, a high-flown and very absurd composition, was completed.

By now it was time to eat; indeed, there are few things that make a man hungrier than long-continued poetical exercise, so Adrian ate. In the midst of the meal his mother returned, pale and anxious-faced, for the poor woman had been engaged in making arrangements for the safety of the beggared widow of the martyred Jansen, a pathetic and even a dangerous task. In his own way Adrian was fond of his mother, but being a selfish puppy he took but little note of her cares or moods. Therefore, seizing the opportunity of an audience he insisted upon reading to her his sonnet, not once but several times.

"Very pretty, my son, very pretty," murmured Lysbeth,

through whose bewildered brain the stilted and meaningless words buzzed like bees in an empty hive, "though I am sure I cannot guess how you find the heart in such times as these to write poetry to fine ladies whom you do not know."

"Poetry, mother," said Adrian sententiously, "is a great consoler; it lifts the mind from the contemplation of petty and sordid cares."

"Petty and sordid cares!" repeated Lysbeth wonderingly, then she added with a kind of cry: "Oh! Adrian, have you no heart that you can watch a saint burn and come home to philosophise about his agonies? Will you never understand? If you could have seen that poor woman this morning who only three months ago was a happy bride." Then bursting into tears Lysbeth turned and fled from the room, for she remembered that what was the fate of the Vrouw Jansen to-day to-morrow might be her own.

This show of emotion quite upset Adrian whose nerves were delicate, and who being honestly attached to his mother did not like to see her weeping.

"Pest on the whole thing," he thought to himself, "why can't we go away and live in some pleasant place where they haven't got any religion, unless it is the worship of Venus? Yes, a place of orange groves, and running streams, and pretty women with guitars, who like having sonnets read to them, and——"

At this moment the door opened and Martin's huge and flaming poll appeared.

"The master wants to know if you are coming to the works, Heer Adrian, and if not will you be so good as to give me the key of the strong-box as he needs the cash book."

With a groan Adrian rose to go, then changed his mind. No, after that perfumed vision of green groves and lovely ladies it was impossible for him to face the malodorous and prosaic foundry.

"Tell them I can't come," he said, drawing the key from his pocket.

"Very good, Heer Adrian, why not?"

"Because I am writing."

"Writing what?" queried Martin.

"A sonnet."

"What's a sonnet?" asked Martin blankly.

"Ill-educated clown," murmured Adrian, then—with a sudden inspiration, "I'll show you what a sonnet is; I will read it to you. Come in and shut the door." Martin obeyed, and was duly rewarded with the sonnet, of which he understood nothing at all except the name of the lady, Isabella d'Ovanda. But Martin was not without the guile of the serpent.

"Beautiful," he said, "beautiful! Read it again, master."

Adrian did so with much delight, remembering the tale of how the music of Orpheus had charmed the very beasts.

"Ah!" said Martin, "that's a love-letter, isn't it, to that splendid, black-eyed marchioness, whom I saw looking at you?"

"Well, not exactly," said Adrian, highly pleased, although to tell the truth he could not recollect upon what occasion the fair Isabella had favoured him with her kind glances. "Yet I suppose that you might call it so, an idealised love-letter, a letter in which ardent and distant yet tender admiration is wrapt with the veil of verse."

"Quite so. Well, Master Adrian, just you send it to her."

"You don't think that she might be offended?" queried Adrian doubtfully.

"Offended!" said Martin, "if she is I know nothing of women" (as a matter of fact he didn't). "No, she will be very pleased; she'll take it away and read it by herself, and sleep with it under her pillow until she knows it by heart, and then I daresay she will ask you to come and see her.

Well, I must be off, but thank you for reading me the beautiful poetry letter, Heer Adrian."

"Really," reflected Adrian, as the door closed behind him, "this is another instance of the deceitfulness of appearances. I always thought Martin a great, brutal fool, yet in his breast, uncultured as it is, the sacred spark still smoulders." And then and there he made up his mind that he would read Martin a further selection of poems upon the first opportunity.

If only Adrian could have been a witness to the scene which at that very moment was in progress at the works! Martin having delivered the key of the box, sought out Foy, and proceeded to tell him the story. More, perfidious one, he handed over a rough draft of the sonnet which he had surreptitiously garnered from the floor, to Foy, who, clad in a leather apron, and seated on the edge of a casting, read it eagerly.

"I told him to send it," went on Martin, "and, by St. Peter, I think he will, and then if he doesn't have old Don Diaz after him with a pistol in one hand and a stiletto in the other, my name isn't Martin Roos."

"Of course, of course," gasped Foy, kicking his legs into the air with delight, "why, they call the old fellow 'Singe jaloux.' Oh! it's capital, and I only hope that he opens the lady's letters."

Thus did Foy, the commonplace and practical, make a mock of the poetic efforts of the high-souled and sentimental Adrian.

Meanwhile Adrian, feeling that he required air after his literary labours, fetched his peregrine from its perch—for he was fond of hawking—and, setting it on his wrist, started out to find a quarry on the marshes near the town.

Before he was halfway down the street he had forgotten all about the sonnet and the lovely Isabella. His was a curious temperament, and this sentimentality, born of vain-

ness and idle hours, by no means expressed it all. That he was what we should nowadays call a prig we know, and also that he possessed his father's, Montalvo's, readiness of speech without his father's sense of humour. In him, as Martin had hinted, the strain of the sire predominated, for in all essentials Adrian was as Spanish in mind as in appearance.

For instance, the sudden and violent passions into which he was apt to fall if thwarted or overlooked were purely Spanish ; there seemed to be nothing of the patient, phlegmatic Netherlander about this side of him. Indeed it was this temper of his perhaps more than any other desire or tendency that made him so dangerous, for, whereas the impulses of his heart were often good enough, they were always liable to be perverted by some access of suddenly provoked rage.

From his birth up Adrian had mixed little with Spaniards, and every influence about him, especially that of his mother, the being whom he most loved on earth, had been anti-Spanish, yet were he an hidalgo fresh from the Court at the Escurial, he could scarcely have been more Castilian. Thus he had been brought up in what might be called a Republican atmosphere, yet he was without sympathy for the love of liberty which animated the people of Holland. The sturdy independence of the Netherlanders, their perpetual criticism of kings and established rules, their vulgar and unheard-of assumption that the good things of the world were free to all honest and hard-working citizens, and not merely the birthright of blue blood, did not appeal to Adrian. Also from childhood he had been a member of the dissenting Church, one of the New Religion. Yet, at heart, he rejected this faith with its humble professors and pastors, its simple, and sometimes squalid rites ; its long and earnest prayers offered to the Almighty in the damp of a cellar or the reek of a cowhouse.

Like thousands of his Spanish fellow-countrymen, he was constitutionally unable to appreciate the fact that true religion and true faith are the natural fruits of penitence and effort, and that individual repentance and striving are the only sacrifices required of man.

For safety's sake, like most politic Netherlanders, Adrian was called upon from time to time to attend worship in the Catholic churches. He did not find the obligation irksome. In fact, the forms and rites of that stately ceremonial, the moving picture of the Mass in those dim aisles, the pealing of the music and the sweet voices of hidden choristers—all these things unsealed a fountain in his bosom and at whiles moved him well nigh to tears. The system appealed to him also, and he could understand that in it were joy and comfort. For here was to be found forgiveness of sins, not far off in the heavens, but at hand upon the earth ; forgiveness to all who bent the head and paid the fee. Here, ready made by that prince of armourers, a Church that claimed to be directly inspired, was a harness of proof which, after the death he dreaded (for he was full of spiritual fears and superstitions), would suffice to turn the shafts of Satan from his poor shivering soul, however steeped in crime. Was not this a more serviceable and practical faith than that of these loud-voiced, rude-handed Lutherans among whom he lived ; men who elected to cast aside this armour and trust instead to a buckler forged by their faith and prayers—yes, and to give up their evil ways and subdue their own desires that they might forge it better ?

Such were the thoughts of Adrian's secret heart, but as yet he had never acted on them, since, however much he might wish to do so, he had not found the courage to break away from the influence of his surroundings. His surroundings—ah ! how he hated them ! How he hated them ! For very shame's sake, indeed, he could not live in complete idleness among folk who were always busy. therefore he

acted as accountant in his stepfather's business, keeping the books of the foundry in a scanty and inefficient fashion, or writing letters to distant customers, for he was a skilled clerk, to order the raw materials necessary to the craft. But of this occupation he was weary, for he had the true Spanish dislike and contempt of trade. In his heart he held that war was the only occupation worthy of a man, successful war, of course, against foes worth plundering, such as Cortes and Pizarro had waged upon the poor Indians of New Spain.

Adrian had read a chronicle of the adventures of these heroes, and bitterly regretted that he had come into the world too late to share them. The tale of heathen foemen slaughtered by thousands, and of the incalculable golden treasures divided among their conquerors, fired his imagination—especially the treasures. At times he would see them in his sleep, baskets full of gems, heaps of barbaric gold and guerdon of fair women slaves, all given by heaven to the true soldier whom it had charged with the sacred work of Christianising unbelievers by means of massacre and the rack.

Oh! how deeply did he desire such wealth and the power which it would bring with it; he who was dependent upon others that looked down upon him as a lazy dreamer, who had never a guilder to spare in his pouch, who had nothing indeed but more debts than he cared to remember. But it never occurred to him to set to work and grow rich like his neighbours by honest toil and commerce. No, that was the task of slaves, like these low Hollander fellows among whom his lot was cast.

Such were the main characteristics of Adrian, surnamed van Goorl; Adrian the superstitious but unspiritual dreamer, the vain Sybarite, the dull poet, the chopper of false logic, the weak and passionate self-seeker, whose best and deepest cravings, such as his love for his mother and another love that shall be told of, were really little more

than a reflection of his own pride and lusts, or at least could be subordinated to their fulfilment. Not that he was altogether bad; somewhere in him there was a better part. Thus: he was capable of good purposes and of bitter remorse; under certain circumstances even he might become capable also of a certain spurious spiritual exaltation. But if this was to bloom in his heart, it must be in a prison strong enough to protect from the blows of temptation. Adrian tempted would always be Adrian overcome. He was fashioned by nature to be the tool of others or of his own desires.

It may be asked what part had his mother in him; where in his weak ignoble nature was the trace of her pure and noble character? It seems hard to find. Was this want to be accounted for by the circumstances connected with his birth, in which she had been so unwilling an agent? Had she given him something of her body but naught of that which was within her own control—her spirit? Who can say? This at least is true, that from his mother's stock he had derived nothing beyond a certain Dutch doggedness of purpose which, when added to his other qualities, might in some events make him formidable—a thing to fear and flee from.

Adrian reached the Witte Poort, and paused on this side of the moat to reflect about things in general. Like most young men of his time and blood, as has been said, he had military leanings, and was convinced that, given the opportunity, he might become one of the foremost generals of his age. Now he was engaged in imagining himself besieging Leyden at the head of a great army, and in fancy disposing his forces after such fashion as would bring about its fall in the shortest possible time. Little did he guess that within some few years this very question was to exercise the brain of Valdez and other great Spanish captains.

Whilst he was thus occupied suddenly a rude voice called, "Wake up, Spaniard," and a hard object—it was a green apple—struck him on his flat cap nearly knocking out the feather. Adrian leaped round with an oath, to catch sight of two lads, louts of about fifteen, projecting their tongues and jeering at him from behind the angles of the gate-house. Now Adrian was not popular with the youth of Leyden, and he knew it well. So, thinking it wisest to take no notice of this affront, he was about to continue on his way when one of the youths, made bold by impunity, stepped from his corner and bowed before him till the ragged cap in his hand touched the dust, saying, in a mocking voice,

"Hans, why do you disturb the noble hidalgo? Cannot you see that the noble hidalgo is going for a walk in the country to look for his most high father, the honourable duke of the Golden Fleece, to whom he is taking a cockolly bird as a present?"

Adrian heard and winced at the sting of the insult, as a high-bred horse winces beneath the lash. Of a sudden rage boiled in his veins like a fountain of fire, and drawing the dagger from his girdle, he rushed at the boys, dragging the hooded hawk, which had become dislodged from his wrist, fluttering through the air after him. At that moment, indeed, he would have been capable of killing one or both of them if he could have caught them, but, fortunately for himself and them, being prepared for an onslaught, they vanished this way and that up the narrow lanes. Presently he stopped, and, still shaking with wrath, replaced the hawk on his wrist and walked across the bridge.

"They shall pay for it," he muttered. "Oh! I will not forget, I will not forget."

Here it may be explained that of the story of his birth Adrian had heard something, but not all. He knew, for instance, that his father's name was Montalvo, that the

marriage with his mother for some reason was declared to be illegal, and that this Montalvo had left the Netherlands under a cloud to find his death, so he had been told, abroad. More than this Adrian did not know for certain, since everybody showed a singular reticence in speaking to him of the matter. Twice he had plucked up courage to question his mother on the subject, and on each occasion her face had turned cold and hard as stone, and she answered almost in the same words :

"Son, I beg you to be silent. When I am dead you will find all the story of your birth written down, but if you are wise you will not read."

Once also he had asked the same question of his stepfather, Dirk van Goorl, whereupon Dirk looked ill at ease and answered :

"Take my advice, lad, and be content to know that you are here and alive with friends to take care of you. Remember that those who dig in churchyards find bones."

"Indeed," replied Adrian haughtily; "at least I trust that there is nothing against my mother's reputation."

At these words, to his surprise, Dirk suddenly turned pale as a sheet and stepped towards him as though he were about to fly at his throat.

"You dare to doubt your mother," he began, "that angel out of Heaven—" then ceased and added presently, "Go ! I beg your pardon ; I should have remembered that you at least are innocent, and it is but natural that the matter weighs upon your mind."

So Adrian went, also that proverb about churchyards and bones made such an impression on him that he did no more digging. In other words he ceased to ask questions, trying to console his mind with the knowledge that, however his father might have behaved to his mother, at least he was a man of ancient rank and ancient blood, which

blood was his to-day. The rest would be forgotten, although enough of it was still remembered to permit of his being taunted by those street louts, and when it was forgotten the blood, that precious blue blood of an hidalgo of Spain, must still remain his heritage.

CHAPTER XI

ADRIAN RESCUES BEAUTY IN DISTRESS

ALL that long evening Adrian wandered about the causeways which pierced the meadowlands and marshes, pondering these things and picturing himself as having attained to the dignity of a grandee of Spain, perhaps even —who could tell—to the proud rank of a Knight of the Golden Fleece entitled to stand covered in the presence of his Sovereign. More than one snipe and other bird such as he had come to hawk rose at his feet, but so preoccupied was he that they were out of flight before he could unhood his falcon. At length, after he had passed the church of Weddinvliet, and, following the left bank of the Old Vliet, was opposite to the wood named Boshhuysen after the half-ruined castle that stood in it, he caught sight of a heron winging its homeward way to the heronry, and cast off his peregrine out of the hood. She saw the quarry at once and dashed towards it, whereon the heron, becoming aware of the approach of its enemy, began to make play, rising high into the air in narrow circles. Swiftly the falcon climbed after it in wider rings till at length she hovered high above and stooped, but in vain. With a quick turn of the wings the heron avoided her, and before the falcon could find her pitch again, was far on its path towards the wood.

Once more the peregrine climbed and stooped with a like result. A third time she soared upwards in great circles, and a third time rushed downwards, now striking the quarry full and binding to it. Adrian, who was following their flight as fast as he could run, leaping some of the dykes in his path and splashing through others, saw and

paused to watch the end. For a moment hawk and quarry hung in the air two hundred feet above the tallest tree beneath them, for at the instant of its taking the heron had begun to descend to the grove for refuge, a struggling black dot against the glow of sunset. Then, still bound together, they rushed downward headlong, for their spread and fluttering wings did not serve to stay their fall, and vanished among the tree-tops.

"Now my good hawk will be killed in the boughs—oh! what a fool was I to fly so near the wood," thought Adrian to himself as again he started forward.

Pushing on at his best pace, soon he was wandering about among the trees as near to that spot where he had seen the birds fall as he could guess it, calling to the falcon and searching for her with his eyes. But here, in the dense grove, the fading light grew faint, so that at length he was obliged to abandon the quest in despair, and turned to find his way to the Leyden road. When within twenty paces of it, suddenly he came upon hawk and heron. The heron was stone dead, and the brave falcon so injured that it seemed hopeless to try to save her, for as he feared, they had crashed through the boughs of a tree in their fall. Adrian looked at her in dismay, for he loved this bird, which was the best of its kind in the city, having trained her himself from a nestling. Indeed there had always been a curious sympathy between himself and this fierce creature of which he made a companion as another man might of a dog. Even now he noted with a sort of pride that broken-winged and shattered though she was, her talons remained fixed in the back of the quarry, and her beak through the neck.

He stroked the falcon's head, whereon the bird, recognising him, loosed her grip of the heron and tried to flutter to her accustomed perch upon his wrist, only to fall to the ground, where she lay watching him with her bright eyes. Then, because there was no help for it, although he choked

with grief at the deed, Adrian struck her on the head with his staff until she died.

"Goodbye, friend," he muttered; "at least that is the best way to go hence, dying with a dead foe beneath," and, picking up the peregrine, he smoothed her ruffled feathers and placed her tenderly in his satchel.

Then it was, just as Adrian rose to his feet, standing beneath the shadow of the big oak upon which the birds had fallen, that coming from the road, which was separated from him by a little belt of undergrowth, he heard the sound of men's voices growling and threatening, and with them a woman's cry for help. At any other time he would have hesitated and reconnoitred, or, perhaps, have retreated at once, for he knew well the dangers of mixing himself up in the quarrels of wayfarers in those rough days. But the loss of the hawk had exasperated his nerves, making any excitement or adventure welcome to him. Therefore, without pausing to think, Adrian pushed forward through the brushwood to find himself in the midst of a curious scene.

Before him ran the grassy road or woodland lane. In the midst of it, sprawling on his back, for he had been pulled from his horse, lay a stout burgher, whose pockets were being rifled by a heavy-browed footpad, who from time to time, doubtless to keep him quiet, threatened his victim with a knife. On the pillion of the burgher's thick-set Flemish horse, which was peacefully cropping at the grass, sat a middle-aged female, who seemed to be stricken dumb with terror, while a few paces away a second ruffian and a tall, bony woman were engaged in dragging a girl from the back of a mule.

Acting on the impulse of the moment, Adrian shouted,

"Come on, friends, here are the thieves," whereon the robber woman took to flight and the man wheeled round, as he turned snatching a naked knife from his girdle. But before he could lift it Adrian's heavy staff crashed down

upon the point of his shoulder, causing him to drop the dagger with a howl of pain. Again the staff rose and fell, this time upon his head, staggering him and knocking off his cap, so that the light, such as it was, shone upon his villainous fat face, the fringe of sandy-coloured whisker running from throat to temples, and the bald head above, which Adrian knew at once for that of Hague Simon, or the Butcher. Fortunately for him, however, the Butcher was too surprised, or too much confused by the blow which he had received upon his head, to recognise his assailant. Nor, having lost his knife, and believing doubtless that Adrian was only the first of a troop of rescuers, did he seem inclined to continue the combat, but, calling to his companion to follow him, he began to run after the woman with a swiftness almost incredible in a man of his build and weight, turning presently into the brushwood, where he and his two fellow thieves vanished away.

Adrian dropped the point of his stick and looked round him, for the whole affair had been so sudden, and the rout of the enemy so complete, that he was tempted to believe he must be dreaming. Not eighty seconds ago he was hiding the dead falcon in his satchel, and now behold! he was a gallant knight who, unarmed, except for a dagger, which he forgot to draw, had conquered two sturdy knaves and a female accomplice, bristling with weapons, rescuing from their clutches Beauty (for doubtless the maiden was beautiful), and, incidentally, her wealthy relatives. Just then the lady, who had been dragged from the mule to the ground, where she still lay, struggled to her knees and looked up, thereby causing the hood of her travelling cloak to fall back from her head.

Thus it was, softened and illuminated by the last pale glow of this summer evening, that Adrian first saw the face of Elsa Brant, the woman upon whom, in the name of love, he was destined to bring so much sorrow.



THUS . . IT WAS THAT ADRIAN FIRST SAW . . ELSA BRANT

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The hero Adrian, overthrower of robbers, looked at the kneeling Elsa, and knew that she was lovely, as, under the circumstances, was right and fitting, and the rescued Elsa, gazing at the hero Adrian, admitted to herself that he was handsome, also that his appearance on the scene had been opportune, not to say providential.

Elsa Brant, the only child of that Hendrik Brant, the friend and cousin of Dirk van Goorl, who has already figured in this history, was just nineteen. Her eyes, and her hair which curled, were brown, her complexion was pale, suggesting delicacy of constitution, her mouth small, with a turn of humour about it, and her chin rather large and firm. She was of middle height, if anything somewhat under it, with an exquisitely rounded and graceful figure and perfect hands. Lacking the stateliness of a Spanish beauty, and the coarse fulness of outline which has always been admired in the Netherlands, Elsa was still without doubt a beautiful woman, though how much of her charm was owing to her bodily attractions, and how much to her vivacious mien and to a certain stamp of spirituality that was set upon her face in repose, and looked out of her clear large eyes when she was thoughtful, it would not be easy to determine. At any rate, her charms were sufficient to make a powerful impression upon Adrian, who, forgetting all about the Marchioness d'Ovanda, inspirer of sonnets, became enamoured of her then and there; partly for her own sake and partly because it was the right kind of thing for a deliverer to do.

But it cannot be said, however deep her feelings of gratitude, that Elsa became enamoured of Adrian. Undoubtedly, as she had recognised, he was handsome, and she much admired the readiness and force with which he had smitten that singularly loathsome-looking individual who had dragged her from the mule. But as it chanced, standing where he did, the shadow of his face lay on the grass

beside her. It was a faint shadow, for the light faded, still it was there, and it fascinated her, for seen thus the fine features became sinister and cruel, and their smile of courtesy and admiration was transformed into a most unpleasant sneer. A trivial accident of light, no doubt, and foolish enough that Elsa should notice it under such circumstances. But notice it she did, and what is more, so quickly are the minds of women turned this way or that, and so illogically do they draw a right conclusion from some pure freak of chance, it raised her prejudice against him.

"Oh! Señor," said Elsa clasping her hands, "how can I thank you enough?"

This speech was short and not original. Yet there were two things about it that Adrian noted with satisfaction; first, that it was uttered in a soft and most attractive voice, and secondly, that the speaker supposed him to be a Spaniard of noble birth.

"Do not thank me at all, gracious lady," he replied, making his lowest bow. "To put to flight two robber rogues and a woman was no great feat, although I had but this staff for weapon," he added, perhaps with a view to impressing upon the maiden's mind that her assailants had been armed while he, the deliverer, was not.

"Ah!" she answered, "I daresay that a brave knight like you thinks nothing of fighting several men at once, but when that wretch with the big hands and the flat face caught hold of me I nearly died of fright. At the best of times I am a dreadful coward, and—no, I thank you, Señor, I can stand now and alone. See, here comes the Heer van Broekhoven under whose escort I am travelling, and look, he is bleeding. Oh! worthy friend, are you hurt?"

"Not much, Elsa," gasped the Heer, for he was still breathless with fright and exhaustion, "but that ruffian—may the hangman have him—gave me a dig in the shoulder

with his knife as he rose to run. However," he added with satisfaction, "he got nothing from me, for I am an old traveller, and he never thought to look in my hat."

"I wonder why they attacked us," said Elsa.

The Heer van Broekhoven rubbed his head thoughtfully. "To rob us, I suppose, but the queer thing is that they were expecting us, for I heard the woman say, 'Here they are; look for the letter on the girl, Butcher.'"

As he spoke Elsa's face turned grave, and Adrian saw her glance at the animal she had been riding and slip her arm through its rein.

"Worthy sir," went on Van Broekhoven, "tell us whom we have to thank."

"I am Adrian, called Van Goorl," Adrian replied with dignity.

"Van Goorl!" said the Heer. "Well, this is strange; Providence could not have arranged it better. Listen, wife," he went on, addressing the stout lady, who all this while had sat still upon the horse, so alarmed and bewildered that she could not speak, "here is a son of Dirk van Goorl, to whom we are charged to deliver Elsa."

"Indeed," answered the good woman, recovering herself somewhat, "I thought from the look of him that he was a Spanish nobleman. But whoever he is I am sure that we are all very much obliged to him, and if he could show us the way out of this dreadful wood, which doubtless is full of robbers, to the house of our kinsfolk, the Broekhovens of Leyden, I should be still more grateful."

"Madam, you have only to accept my escort, and I assure you that you need fear no more robbers. Might I in turn ask this lady's name?"

"Certainly, young sir, she is Elsa Brant, the only child of Hendrik Brant, the famous goldsmith of The Hague, but doubtless now that you know her name you know all

that also, for she must be some kind of cousin to you. Husband, help Elsa on to her mule."

"Let that be my duty," said Adrian, and, springing forward, he lifted Elsa to the saddle gracefully enough. Then, taking her mule by the bridle, he walked onwards through the wood praying in his heart that the Butcher and his companions would not find courage to attack them again before they were out of its depths.

"Tell me, sir, are you Foy?" asked Elsa in a puzzled voice.

"No," answered Adrian, shortly, "I am his brother."

"Ah! that explains it. You see I was perplexed, for I remember Foy when I was quite little; a beautiful boy, with blue eyes and yellow hair, who was always very kind to me. Once he stopped at my father's house at The Hague with his father."

"Indeed," said Adrian, "I am glad to hear that Foy was ever beautiful. I can only remember that he was very stupid, for I used to try to teach him. At any rate, I am afraid you will not think him beautiful now—that is, unless you admire young men who are almost as broad as they are long."

"Oh! Heer Adrian," she answered, laughing, "I am afraid that fault can be found with most of us North Holland folk, and myself among the number. You see it is given to very few of us to be tall and noble-looking like high-born Spaniards—not that I should wish to resemble any Spaniard, however lovely she might be," Elsa added, with a slight hardening of her voice and face. "But," she went on hurriedly, as though sorry that the remark had escaped her, "you, sir, and Foy are strangely unlike to be brothers; is it not so?"

"We are half-brothers," said Adrian looking straight before him; "we have the same mother only; but please do not call me 'sir,' call me 'cousin.'"

"No, I cannot do that," she replied gaily, "for Foy's mother is no relation of mine. I think that I must call you 'Sir Prince,' for, you see, you appeared at exactly the right time; just like the Prince in the fairy-tales, you know."

Here was an opening not to be neglected by a young man of Adrian's stamp.

"Ah!" he said in a tender voice, and looking up at the lady with his dark eyes, "that is a happy name indeed. I would ask no better lot than to be your Prince, now and always charged to defend you from every danger." (Here, it may be explained, that, however exaggerated his language, Adrian honestly meant what he said, seeing that already he was convinced that to be the husband of the beautiful heiress of one of the wealthiest men in the Netherlands would be a very satisfactory walk in life for a young man in his position.)

"Oh! Sir Prince," broke in Elsa hurriedly, for her cavalier's ardour was somewhat embarrassing, "you are telling the story wrong; the tale I mean did not go on like that at all. Don't you remember? The hero rescued the lady and handed her over—to—to—her father."

"Of whom I think he came to claim her afterwards," replied Adrian with another languishing glance, and a smile of conscious vanity at the neatness of his answer. Their glances met, and suddenly Adrian became aware that Elsa's face had undergone a complete change. The piquante, half-amused smile had passed out of it; it was strained and hard and the eyes were frightened.

"Oh! now I understand the shadow—how strange," she exclaimed in a new voice.

"What is the matter? What is strange?" he asked.

"Oh!—only that your face reminded me so much of a man of whom I am terrified. No, no, I am foolish, it is nothing, those footpads have upset me. Praise be to God

that we are out of that dreadful wood! Look, neighbour Broekhoven, here is Leyden before us. Are not those red roofs pretty in the twilight, and how big the churches seem. See, too, there is water all round the walls; it must be a very strong town. I should think that even the Spaniards could not take it, and oh! I am sure that it would be a good thing if we might find a city which we were quite, quite certain the Spaniards could never take—all, all of us," and she sighed heavily.

"If I were a Spanish general with a proper army," began Adrian pompously, "I would take Leyden easily enough. Only this afternoon I studied its weak spots, and made a plan of attack which could scarcely fail, seeing that the place would only be defended by a mob of untrained, half-armed burghers."

Again that curious look returned into Elsa's eyes.

"If you were a Spanish general," she said slowly. "How can you jest about such a thing as the sacking of a town by Spaniards? Do you know what it means? That is how they talk; I have heard them," and she shuddered, then went on: "You are not a Spaniard, are you, sir, that you can speak like that?" And without waiting for an answer Elsa urged her mule forward, leaving him a little behind.

Presently as they passed through the Witte Poort, he was at her side again and chatting to her, but although she replied courteously enough, he felt that an invisible barrier had arisen between them. Yes, she had read his secret heart; it was as though she had been a party to his thoughts when he stood by the bridge this afternoon designing plans for the taking of Leyden, and half wishing that he might share in its capture. She mistrusted him, and was half afraid of him, and Adrian knew that it was so.

Ten minutes' ride through the quiet town, for in those days of terror and suspicion unless business took them

abroad people did not frequent the streets much after sundown, brought the party to the van Goorl's house in the Bree Straat. Here Adrian dismounted and tried to open the door, only to find that it was locked and barred. This seemed to exasperate a temper already somewhat excited by the various events and experiences of the day, and more especially by the change in Elsa's manner; at any rate he used the knocker with unnecessary energy. After a while, with much turning of keys and drawing of bolts, the door was opened, revealing Dirk, his stepfather, standing in the passage, candle in hand, while behind, as though to be ready for any emergency, loomed the great stooping shape of Red Martin.

"Is that you, Adrian?" asked Dirk in a voice at once testy and relieved. "Then why did you not come to the side entrance instead of forcing us to unbar here?"

"Because I bring you a guest," replied Adrian pointing to Elsa and her companions. "It did not occur to me that you would wish guests to be smuggled in by a back door as though—as though they were ministers of our New Religion."

The bow had been drawn at a venture but the shaft went home, for Dirk started and whispered: "Be silent, fool." Then he added aloud, "Guest! What guest?"

"It is I, cousin Dirk, I, Elsa, Hendrik Brant's daughter," she said, sliding from her mule.

"Elsa Brant!" ejaculated Dirk. "Why, how came you here?"

"I will tell you presently," she answered; "I cannot talk in the street," and she touched her lips with her finger. "These are my friends, the van Broekhovens, under whose escort I have travelled from The Hague. They wish to go on to the house of their relations, the other Broekhovens, if some one will show them the way."

Then followed greetings and brief explanations. After

these the Broekhovens departed to the house of their relatives, under the care of Martin, while, its saddle having been removed and carried into the house at Elsa's express request, Adrian led the mule round to the stable.

When Dirk had kissed and welcomed his young cousin he ushered her, still accompanied by the saddle, into the room where his wife and Foy were at supper, and with them the Pastor Arentz, that clergyman who had preached to them on the previous night. Here he found Lysbeth, who had risen from the table anxiously awaiting his return. So dreadful were the times that a knocking on the door at an unaccustomed hour was enough to throw those within into a paroxysm of fear, especially if at the moment they chanced to be harbouring a pastor of the New Faith, a crime punishable with death. That sound might mean nothing more than a visit from a neighbour, or it might be the trump of doom to every soul within the house, signifying the approach of the familiars of the Inquisition and of a martyr's crown. Therefore Lysbeth uttered a sigh of joy when her husband appeared, followed only by a girl.

"Wife," he said, "here is our cousin, Elsa Brant, come to visit us from The Hague, though why I know not as yet. You remember Elsa, the little Elsa, with whom we used to play so many years ago."

"Yes, indeed," answered Lysbeth, as she put her arms about her and embraced her, saying, "welcome, child, though," she added, glancing at her, "you should no longer be called child who have grown into so fair a maid. But look, here is the Pastor Arentz, of whom you may have heard, for he is the friend of your father and of us all."

"In truth, yes," answered Elsa curtseying, a salute which Arentz acknowledged by saying gravely,

"Daughter, I greet you in the name of the Lord, who

has brought you to this house safely, for which give thanks."

"Truly, Pastor, I have need to do so since—" and suddenly she stopped, for her eyes met those of Foy, who was gazing at her with such wonder and admiration stamped upon his open face that Elsa coloured at the sight. Then, recovering herself, she held out her hand, saying, "Surely you are my cousin Foy; I should have known you again anywhere by your hair and eyes."

"I am glad," he answered simply, for it flattered him to think that this beautiful young lady remembered her old playmate, whom she had not seen for at least eleven years, adding, "but I do not think I should have known you."

"Why?" she asked, "have I changed so much?"

"Yes," Foy answered bluntly, "you used to be a thin little girl with red arms, and now you are the most lovely maiden I ever saw."

At this speech everybody laughed, including the Pastor, while Elsa, reddening still more, replied, "Cousin, I remember that *you* used to be rude, but now you have learned to flatter, which is worse. Nay, I beg of you, spare me," for Foy showed signs of wishing to argue the point. Then turning from him she slipped off her cloak and sat down on the chair which Dirk had placed for her at the table, reflecting in her heart that she wished it had been Foy who rescued her from the wood thieves, and not the more polished Adrian.

Afterwards as the meal went on she told the tale of their adventure. Scarcely was it done when Adrian entered the room. The first thing he noticed was that Elsa and Foy were seated side by side, engaged in animated talk, and the second, that there was no cover for him at the table.

"Have I your permission to sit down, mother?" he asked in a loud voice, for no one had seen him come in.

"Certainly, son, why not?" answered Lysbeth, kindly. Adrian's voice warned her that his temper was ruffled.

"Because there is no place for me, mother, that is all, though doubtless it is more worthily filled by the Rev. Pastor Arentz. Still, after a man has been fighting for his life with armed thieves, well—a bit of food and a place to eat it in would have been welcome."

"Fighting for your life, son!" said Lysbeth astonished. "Why, from what Elsa has just been telling us, I gathered that the rascals ran away at the first blow which you struck with your staff."

"Indeed, mother; well, doubtless if the lady says that, it was so. I took no great note; at the least they ran and she was saved, with the others; a small service not worth mentioning, still useful in its way."

"Oh! take my chair, Adrian," said Foy rising, "and don't make such a stir about a couple of cowardly footpads and an old hag. You don't want us to think you a hero because you didn't turn tail and leave Elsa and her companions in their hands, do you?"

"What you think, or do not think, brother, is a matter of indifference to me," replied Adrian, seating himself with an injured air.

"Whatever my cousin Foy may think, Heer Adrian," broke in Elsa anxiously, "I am sure I thank God who sent so brave a gentleman to help us. Yes, yes, I mean it, for it makes me sick to remember what might have happened if you had not rushed at those wicked men like—like——"

"Like David on the Philistines," suggested Foy.

"You should study your Bible, lad," put in Arentz with a grave smile. "It was Samson who slew the Philistines; David conquered the giant Goliath, though it is true that he also was a Philistine."

"Like Samson—I mean David—on Goliath," continued

Elsa confusedly. "Oh! please, cousin Foy, do not laugh; I believe that you would have left me at the mercy of that dreadful man with a flat face and the bald head, who was trying to steal my father's letter. By the way, cousin Dirk, I have not given it to you yet, but it is quite safe, sewn up in the lining of the saddle, and I was to tell you that you must read it by the old cypher."

"Man with a flat face," said Dirk anxiously, as he slit away at the stitches of the saddle to find the letter; "tell me about him. What was he like, and what makes you think he wished to take the paper from you?"

So Elsa described the appearance of the man and of the black-eyed hag, his companion, and repeated also the words that the Heer van Broekhoven had heard the woman utter before the attack took place.

"That sounds like the spy, Hague Simon, him whom they call the Butcher, and his wife, Black Meg," said Dirk. "Adrian, you must have seen these people, was it they?"

For a moment Adrian considered whether he should tell the truth; then, for certain reasons of his own, decided that he would not. Black Meg, it may be explained, in the intervals of graver business was not averse to serving as an emissary of Venus. In short, she arranged assignations, and Adrian was fond of assignations. Hence his reticence.

"How should I know?" he answered, after a pause; "the place was gloomy, and I have only set eyes upon Hague Simon and his wife about twice in my life."

"Softly, brother," said Foy, "and stick to the truth, however gloomy the wood may have been. You know Black Meg pretty well at any rate, for I have often seen you—" and he stopped suddenly, as though sorry that the words had slipped from his tongue.

"Adrian, is this so?" asked Dirk in the silence which followed.

"No, stepfather," answered Adrian.

"You hear," said Dirk addressing Foy. "In future, son, I trust that you will be more careful with your words. It is no charge to bring lightly against a man that he has been seen in the fellowship of one of the most infamous wretches in Leyden, a creature whose hands are stained red with the blood of innocent men and women, and who, as your mother knows, once brought me near to the scaffold."

Suddenly the laughing boyish look passed out of the face of Foy, and it grew stern.

"I am sorry for my words," he said, "since Black Meg does other things besides spying, and Adrian may have had business of his own with her which is no affair of mine. But, as they are spoken, I can't eat them, so you must decide which of us is—not truthful."

"Nay, Foy, nay," interposed Arentz, "do not put it thus. Doubtless there is some mistake, and have I not told you before that you are over rash of tongue?"

"Yes, and a great many other things," answered Foy, "every one of them true, for I am a miserable sinner. Well, all right, there is a mistake, and it is," he added, with an air of radiant innocency that somehow was scarcely calculated to deceive, "that I was merely poking a stick into Adrian's temper. I never saw him talking to Black Meg. Now, are you satisfied?"

Then the storm broke, as Elsa, who had been watching the face of Adrian while he listened to Foy's artless but somewhat fatuous explanation, saw that it must break.

"There is a conspiracy against me," said Adrian, who had grown white with rage; "yes, everything has conspired against me to-day. First the ragamuffins in the street make a mock of me, and then my hawk is killed. Next it chances that I rescue this lady and her companions from robbers in the wood. But, do I get any thanks for this? No, I come home to find that I am so much forgotten that no place is even laid for me at table; more, to be jeered at

for the humble services that I have done. Lastly, I have the lie given to me, and without reproach, by my brother, who, were he not my brother, should answer for it at the sword's point."

"Oh! Adrian, Adrian," broke in Foy, "don't be a fool; stop before you say something you will be sorry for."

"That isn't all," went on Adrian, taking no heed. "Whom do I find at this table? The worthy Heer Arentz, a minister of the New Religion. Well, I protest. I belong to the New Religion myself, having been brought up in that faith, but it must be well known that the presence of a pastor here in our house exposes everybody to the risk of death. If my stepfather and Foy choose to take that risk, well and good, but I maintain that they have no right to lay its consequences upon my mother, whose eldest son I am, nor even upon myself."

Now Dirk rose and tapped Adrian on the shoulder. "Young man," he said coldly and with glittering eyes, "listen to me. The risks which I and my son, Foy, and my wife, your mother, take, we run for conscience sake. You have nothing to do with them, it is our affair. But since you have raised the question, if your faith is not strong enough to support you I acknowledge that I have no right to bring you into danger. Look you, Adrian, you are no son of mine; in you I have neither part nor lot, yet I have cared for you and supported you since you were born under very strange and unhappy circumstances. Yes, you have shared whatever I had to give with my own son, without preference or favour, and should have shared it even after my death. And now, if these are your opinions, I am tempted to say to you that the world is wide and that, instead of idling here upon my bounty, you would do well to win your own way through it as far from Leyden as may please you."

"You throw your benefits in my teeth, and reproach me with my birth," broke in Adrian, who by now was almost

raving with passion, "as though it were a crime in me to have other blood running in my veins than that of Netherlander tradesfolk. Well, if so, it would seem that the crime was my mother's, and not mine, who——"

"Adrian, Adrian!" cried Foy, in warning, but the madman heeded not.

"Who," he went on, furiously, "was content to be the companion, for I understand that she was never really married to him, of some noble Spaniard before she became the wife of a Leyden artisan."

He ceased, and at this moment there broke from Lysbeth's lips a low wail of such bitter anguish that it chilled even his mad rage to silence.

"Shame on thee, my son," said the wail, "who art not ashamed to speak thus of the mother that bore thee."

"Ay," echoed Dirk, in the stillness that followed, "shame on thee! Once thou wast warned, but now I warn no more."

Then he stepped to the door, opened it, and called, "Martin, come hither."

Presently, still in that heavy silence, which was broken only by the quick breath of Adrian panting like some wild beast in a net, was heard the sound of heavy feet shuffling down the passage. Then Martin entered the room, and stood there gazing about him with his large blue eyes, that were like the eyes of a wondering child.

"Your pleasure, master," he said at length.

"Martin Roos," replied Dirk, waving back Arentz who rose to speak, "take that young man, my stepson, the Heer Adrian, and lead him from my house—without violence if possible. My order is that henceforth you are not to suffer him to set foot within its threshold; see that it is not disobeyed. Go, Adrian, to-morrow your possessions shall be sent to you, and with them such money as shall suffice to start you in the world."



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"I WILL SHOW YOU HOW A GENTLEMAN TREATS DOGS!"

Without comment or any expression of surprise, the huge Martin shuffled forward towards Adrian, his hand outstretched as though to take him by the arm.

"What!" exclaimed Adrian, as Martin advanced down the room, "you set your mastiff on me, do you? Then I will show you how a gentleman treats dogs," and suddenly, a naked dagger shining in his hand, he leaped straight at the Frisian's throat. So quick and fierce was the onslaught that only one issue to it seemed possible. Elsa gasped and closed her eyes, thinking when she opened them to see that knife plunged to the hilt in Martin's breast, and Foy sprang forward. Yet in this twinkling of an eye the danger was done with, for by some movement too quick to follow, Martin had dealt his assailant such a blow upon the arm that the poniard, jarred from his grasp, flew flashing across the room to fall in Lysbeth's lap. Another second and the iron grip had closed upon Adrian's shoulder, and although he was strong and struggled furiously, yet he could not loose the hold of that single hand.

"Please cease fighting, Mynheer Adrian, for it is quite useless," said Martin to his captive in a voice as calm as though nothing unusual had happened. Then he turned and walked with him towards the door.

On the threshold Martin stopped, and looking over his shoulder said, "Master, I think that the Heer is dead, do you still wish me to put him into the street?"

They crowded round and stared. It was true, Adrian seemed to be dead; at least his face was like that of a corpse, while from the corner of his mouth blood trickled in a thin stream.

CHAPTER XII

THE SUMMONS

"WRETCHED man!" said Lysbeth wringing her hands, and with a shudder shaking the dagger from her lap as though it had been a serpent, "you have killed my son."

"Your pardon, mistress," replied Martin placidly; "but that is not so. The master ordered me to remove the Heer Adrian, whereon the Heer Adrian very naturally tried to stab me. But I, having been accustomed to such things in my youth," and he looked deprecatingly towards the Pastor Arentz, "struck the Heer Adrian upon the bone of his elbow, causing the knife to jump from his hand, for had I not done so I should have been dead and unable to execute the commands of my master. Then I took the Heer Adrian by the shoulder, gently as I might, and walked away with him, whereupon he died of rage, for which I am very sorry but not to blame."

"You are right, man," said Lysbeth, "it is you who are to blame, Dirk; yes, you have murdered my son. Oh! never mind what he said, his temper was always fierce, and who pays any heed to the talk of a man in a mad passion."

"Why did you let your brother be thus treated, cousin Foy?" broke in Elsa quivering with indignation. "It was cowardly of you to stand still and see that great red creature crush the life out of him when you know well that it was because of your taunts that he lost his temper and said things that he did not mean, as I do myself sometimes.

No, I will never speak to you again—and only this afternoon he saved me from the robbers!" and she burst into weeping.

"Peace, peace! this is no time for angry words," said the Pastor Arentz, pushing his way through the group of bewildered men and overwrought women. "He can scarcely be dead; let me look at him, I am something of a doctor," and he knelt by the senseless and bleeding Adrian to examine him.

"Take comfort, Vrouw van Goorl," he said presently, "your son is not dead, for his heart beats, nor has his friend Martin injured him in any way by the exercise of his strength, but I think that in his fury he has burst a blood-vessel, for he bleeds fast. My counsel is that he should be put to bed and his head cooled with cold water till the surgeon can be fetched to treat him. Lift him in your arms, Martin."

So Martin carried Adrian, not to the street, but to his bed, while Foy, glad of an excuse to escape the undeserved reproaches of Elsa and the painful sight of his mother's grief, went to seek the physician. In due course he returned with him, and, to the great relief of all of them, the learned man announced that, notwithstanding the blood which he had lost, he did not think that Adrian would die, though, at the best, he must keep his bed for some weeks, have skilful nursing and be humoured in all things.

While his wife Lysbeth and Elsa were attending to Adrian, Dirk and his son, Foy, for the Pastor Arentz had gone, sat upstairs talking in the sitting-room, that same balconied chamber in which once Dirk had been refused while Montalvo hid behind the curtain. Dirk was much disturbed, for when his wrath had passed he was a tender-hearted man, and his stepson's plight distressed him greatly. Now he was justifying himself to Foy, or, rather, to his own conscience.

"A man who could speak so of his own mother, was not fit to stop in the same house with her," he said; "moreover, you heard his words about the pastor. I tell you, son, I am afraid of this Adrian."

"Unless that bleeding from his mouth stops soon you will not have cause to fear him much longer," replied Foy sadly, "but if you want my opinion about the business, father, why here it is—I think that you have made too much of a small matter. Adrian is—Adrian; he is not one of us, and he should not be judged as though he were. You cannot imagine me flying into a fury because the women forgot to set my place at table, or trying to stab Martin and bursting a blood vessel because you told him to lead me out of the room. No, I should know better, for what is the use of any ordinary man attempting to struggle against Martin? He might as well try to argue with the Inquisition. But then I am I, and Adrian is Adrian."

"But the words he used, son. Remember the words."

"Yes, and if I had spoken them they would have meant a great deal, but in Adrian's mouth I think no more of them than if they came from some angry woman. Why, he is always sulking, or taking offence, or flying into rages over something or other, and when he is like that it all means—just nothing except that he wants to use fine talk and show off and play the Don over us. He did not really mean to lie to me when he said that I had not seen him talking to Black Meg, he only meant to contradict, or perhaps to hide something up. As a matter of fact, if you want to know the truth, I believe that the old witch took notes for him to some young lady, and that Hague Simon supplied him with rats for his hawks."

"Yes, Foy, that may be so, but how about his talk of the pastor? It makes me suspicious, son. You know the times we live in, and if he should go that way—remember it is in his blood—the lives of every one of us are in his

hand. The father tried to burn me once, and I do not wish the child to finish the work."

"Then when they come out of his hand, you are at liberty to cut off mine," answered Foy hotly. "I have been brought up with Adrian, and I know what he is; he is vain and pompous, and every time he looks at you and me he thanks God that he was not made like that. Also he has failings and vices, and he is lazy, being too fine a gentleman to work like a common Flemish burgher, and all the rest of it. But, father, he has a good heart, and if any man outside this house were to tell me that Adrian is capable of playing the traitor and bringing his own family to the scaffold, well, I would make him swallow his words, or try to, that is all. As regards what he said about my mother's first marriage"—and Foy hung his head—"of course it is a subject on which I have no right to talk, but, father, speaking as one man to another—he *is* sadly placed and innocent, whatever others may have been, and I don't wonder that he feels sore about the story."

As he spoke the door opened and Lysbeth entered.

"How goes it with Adrian, wife?" Dirk asked hastily.

"Better, husband, thank God, though the doctor stays with him for this night. He has lost much blood, and at the best must lie long abed; above all none must cross his mood or use him roughly," and she looked at her husband with meaning.

"Peace, wife," Dirk answered with irritation. "Foy here has just read me one lecture upon my dealings with your son, and I am in no mood to listen to another. I served the man as he deserved, neither less nor more, and if he chose to go mad and vomit blood, why it is no fault of mine. You should have brought him up to a soberer habit."

"Adrian is not as other men are, and ought not to be

measured by the same rule," said Lysbeth, almost repeating Foy's words.

"So I have been told before, wife, though I, who have but one standard of right and wrong, find the saying hard. But so be it. Doubtless the rule for Adrian is that which should be used to measure angels—or Spaniards, and not one suited to us poor Hollanders who do our work, pay our debts, and don't draw knives on unarmed men!"

"Have you read the letter from your cousin Brant?" asked Lysbeth, changing the subject.

"No," answered Dirk, "what with daggers, swoonings, and scoldings it slipped my mind," and drawing the paper from his tunic he cut the silk and broke the seals. "I had forgotten," he went on, looking at the sheets of words interspersed with meaningless figures; "it is in our private cypher, as Elsa said, or at least most of it is. Get the key from my desk, son, and let us set to work, for our task is likely to be long."

Foy obeyed, returning presently with an old Testament of a very scarce edition. With the help of this book and an added vocabulary by slow degrees they deciphered the long epistle, Foy writing it down sentence by sentence as they learned their significance. When at length the task was finished, which was not till well after midnight, Dirk read the translation aloud to Lysbeth and his son. It ran thus:

"Well-beloved cousin and old friend, you will be astonished to see my dear child Elsa, who brings you this paper sewn in her saddle, where I trust none will seek it, and wonder why she comes to you without warning. I will tell you.

"You know that here the axe and the stake are very busy, for at The Hague the devil walks loose; yes, he is the master in this land. Well, although the blow has not yet fallen on me, since for a while I have bought off the in-

formers, hour by hour the sword hangs over my head, nor can I escape it in the end. That I am suspected of the New Faith is not my real crime. You can guess it. Cousin, they desire my wealth. Now I have sworn that no Spaniard shall have this, no, not if I must sink it in the sea to save it from them, since it has been heaped up to another end. Yet they desire it sorely, and spies are about my path and about my bed. Worst among them all, and at the head of them, is a certain Ramiro, a one-eyed man, but lately come from Spain, it is said as an agent of the Inquisition, whose manners are those of a person who was once a gentleman, and who seems to know this country well. This fellow has approached me, offering if I will give him three-parts of my wealth to secure my escape with the rest, and I have told him that I will consider the offer. For this reason only I have a little respite, since he desires that my money should go into his pocket and not into that of the Government. But, by the help of God, neither of them shall touch it.

"See you, Dirk, the treasure is not here in the house as they think. It is hidden, but in a spot where it cannot stay.

"Therefore, if you love me, and hold that I have been a good friend to you, send your son Foy with one other strong and trusted man—your Frisian servant, Martin, if possible—on the morrow after you receive this. When night falls he should have been in The Hague some hours, and have refreshed himself, but let him not come near me or my house. Half an hour after sunset let him, followed by his serving man, walk up and down the right side of the Broad Street in The Hague, as though seeking adventures, till a girl, also followed by a servant, pushes up against him as if on purpose, and whispers in his ear, 'Are you from Leyden, sweetheart?' Then he must say 'Yes,' and accompany her till he comes to a place where he will learn

what must be done and how to do it. Above all, he must follow no woman who may accost him and who does not repeat these words. The girl who addresses him will be short, dark, pretty, and gaily dressed, with a red bow upon her left shoulder. But let him not be misled by look or dress unless she speaks the words.

"If he reaches England or Leyden safely with the stuff let him hide it for the present, friend, till your heart tells you it is needed. I care not where, nor do I wish to know, for if I knew, flesh and blood are weak, and I might give up the secret when they stretch me on the rack.

"Already you have my will sent to you three months ago, and enclosed in it a list of goods. Open it now and you will find that under it my possessions pass to you and your heirs absolutely as my executors, for such especial trusts and purposes as are set out therein. Elsa has been ailing, and it is known that the leech has ordered her a change. Therefore her journey to Leyden will excite no wonder, neither, or so I hope, will even Ramiro guess that I should enclose a letter such as this in so frail a casket. Still, there is danger, for spies are many, but having no choice, and my need being urgent, I must take the risks. If the paper is seized they cannot read it, for they will never make out the cypher, since, even did they know of them, no copies of our books can be found in Holland. Moreover, were this writing all plain Dutch or Spanish, it tells nothing of the whereabouts of the treasure, of its destination, or of the purpose to which it is dedicate. Lastly, should any Spaniard chance to find that wealth, it will vanish, and, mayhap, he with it."

"What can he mean by that?" interrupted Foy.

"I know not," answered Dirk. "My cousin Brant is not a person who speaks at random, so perhaps we have misinterpreted the passage." Then he went on reading:

"Now I have done with the pelf, which must take its

chance. Only, I pray you—I trust it to your honour and to your love of an old friend to bury it, burn it, cast it to the four winds of heaven before you suffer a Spaniard to touch a gem or a piece of gold.

"I send to you to-day Elsa, my only child. You will know my reason. She will be safer with you in Leyden than here at The Hague, since if they take me they might take her also. The priests and their tools do not spare the young, especially if their rights stand between them and money. Also she knows little of my desperate strait; she is ignorant even of the contents of this letter, and I do not wish that she should share these troubles. I am a doomed man, and she loves me, poor child. One day she will hear that it is over, and that will be sad for her, but it would be worse if she knew all from the beginning. When I bid her good-bye to-morrow, it will be for the last time—God give me strength to bear the blow.

"You are her guardian, as you deal with her—nay, I must be crazy with my troubles, for none other would think it needful to remind Dirk van Goorl or his son of their duty to the dead. Farewell, friend and cousin. God guard you and yours in these dreadful times with which it has pleased Him to visit us for a season, that through us perhaps this country and the whole world may be redeemed from priestcraft and tyranny. Greet your honoured wife, Lysbeth, from me; also your son Foy, who used to be a merry lad, and whom I hope to see again within a night or two, although it may be fated that we shall not meet. My blessing on him, especially if he prove faithful in all these things. May the Almighty who guards us give us a happy meeting in the hereafter which is at hand. Pray for me. Farewell, farewell.—HENDRIK BRANT.

"P. S. I beg the dame Lysbeth to see that Elsa wears woollen when the weather turns damp or cold, since her chest is somewhat delicate. This was my wife's last charge,

and I pass it on to you. As regards her marriage, should she live, I leave that to your judgment with this command only, that her inclination shall not be forced, beyond what is right and proper. When I am dead, kiss her for me, and tell her that I loved her beyond any creature now living on the earth, and that wherever I am from day to day I wait to welcome her, as I shall wait to welcome you and yours, Dirk van Goorl. In case these presents miscarry, I will send duplicates of them, also in mixed cypher, whenever chance may offer."

Having finished reading the translation of this cypher document, Dirk bent his head while he folded it, not wishing that his face should be seen. Foy also turned aside to hide the tears which gathered in his eyes, while Lysbeth wept openly.

"A sad letter and sad times!" said Dirk at length.

"Poor Elsa," muttered Foy, then added, with a return of hopefulness, "perhaps he is mistaken, he may escape after all."

Lysbeth shook her head as she answered,

"Hendrik Brant is not the man to write like that if there was any hope for him, nor would he part with his daughter unless he knew that the end must be near at hand."

"Why, then, does he not fly?" asked Foy.

"Because the moment he stirred the Inquisition would pounce upon him, as a cat pounces upon a mouse that tries to run from its corner," replied his father. "While the mouse sits still the cat sits also and purrs; when it moves——"

There was a silence in which Dirk, having fetched the will of Hendrik Brant from a safe hiding place, where it had lain since it reached his hands some months before, opened the seals and read it aloud.

It proved to be a very short document, under the terms

of which Dirk van Goorl and his heirs inherited all the property, real and personal, of Hendrik Brant, upon trust (1), to make such ample provision for his daughter Elsa as might be needful or expedient; (2) to apply the remainder of the money "for the defence of our country, the freedom of religious Faith, and the destruction of the Spaniards in such fashion and at such time or times as God should reveal to them, which," added the will, "assuredly He will do."

Enclosed in this document was an inventory of the property that constituted the treasure. At the head came an almost endless list of jewels, all of them carefully scheduled. These were the first three items:

"Item: The necklace of great pearls that I exchanged with the Emperor Charles when he took a love for sapphires, enclosed in a watertight copper box.

"Item: A coronet and stomacher of rubies mounted in my own gold work, the best that ever I did, which three queens have coveted, and none was rich enough to buy.

"Item: The great emerald that my father left me, the biggest known, having magic signs of the ancients engraved upon the back of it, and enclosed in a chased case of gold."

Then came other long lists of precious stones, too numerous to mention, but of less individual value, and after them this entry:

"Item: Four casks filled with gold coin (I know not the exact weight or number)."

At the bottom of this schedule was written, "A very great treasure, the greatest in all the Netherlands, a fruit of three generations of honest trading and saving, converted by me for the most part into jewels, that it may be easier to move. This is the prayer of me, Hendrik Brant, who owns it for his life; that this gold may prove the earthly doom of any Spaniard who tries to steal it, and as I write it comes

into my mind that God will grant this my petition. Amen. Amen. Amen! So say I, Hendrik Brant, who stand at the Gate of Death."

All of this inventory Dirk read aloud, and when he had finished Lysbeth gasped with amazement.

"Surely," she said, "this little cousin of ours is richer than many princes. Yes, with such a dowry princes would be glad to take her in marriage."

"The fortune is large enough," answered Dirk. "But, oh! what a burden has Hendrik Brant laid upon our backs, for under this will the wealth is left, not straight to the lawful heiress, Elsa, but to me and to my heirs on the trusts stated, and they are heavy. Look you, wife, the Spaniards know of this vast hoard, and the priests know of it, and no stone in earth or hell will they leave unturned to win that money. I say that, for his own sake, my cousin Hendrik would have done better to accept the offer of the Spanish thief Ramiro and give him three-fourths and escape to England with the rest. But that is not his nature, who was ever stubborn, and who would die ten times over rather than enrich the men he hates. Moreover, he, who is no miser, has saved this fortune that the bulk of it may be spent for his country in the hour of her need, and alas! of that need we are made the judges, since he is called away. Wife, I foresee that these gems and gold will breed bloodshed and misery to all our house. But the trust is laid upon us and it must be borne. Foy, to-morrow at dawn you and Martin will start for The Hague to carry out the command of your cousin Brant."

"Why should my son's life be risked on this mad errand?" asked Lysbeth.

"Because it is a duty, mother," answered Foy cheerfully, although he tried to look depressed. He was young and enterprising; moreover, the adventure promised to be full of novelty.

In spite of himself Dirk smiled and bade him summon Martin.

A minute later Foy was in the great man's den and kicking at his prostrate form. "Wake up, you snoring bull," he said, "awake!"

Martin sat up, his red head showing like a fire in the shine of the taper. "What is it now, Master Foy?" he asked yawning. "Are they after us about those two dead soldiers?"

"No, you sleepy lump, it's treasure."

"I don't care about treasure," replied Martin, indifferently.

"It's Spaniards."

"That sounds better," said Martin, shutting his mouth. "Tell me about it, Master Foy, while I pull on my jerkin."

So Foy told him as much as he could in two minutes.

"Yes, it sounds well," commented Martin, critically. "If I know anything of those Spaniards, we shan't get back to Leyden without something happening. But I don't like that bit about the women; as likely as not they will spoil everything."

Then he accompanied Foy to the upper room, and there received his instructions from Dirk with a solemn and unmoved countenance.

"Are you listening?" asked Dirk, sharply. "Do you understand?"

"I think so, master," replied Martin. "Hear;" and he repeated sentence by sentence every word that had fallen from Dirk's lips, for when he chose to use it Martin's memory was good. "One or two questions, master," he said. "This stuff must be brought through at all hazards?"

"At all hazards," answered Dirk.

"And if we cannot bring it through, it must be hidden in the best way possible?"

"Yes."

"And if people should try to interfere with us, I understand that we must fight?"

"Of course."

"And if in the fighting we chance to kill anybody I shall not be reproached and called a murderer by the pastor or others?"

"I think not," replied Dirk.

"And if anything should happen to my young master here, his blood will not be laid upon my head?"

Lysbeth groaned. Then she stood up and spoke.

"Martin, why do you ask such foolish questions? Your peril my son must share, and if harm should come to him as may chance, we shall know well that it is no fault of yours. You are not a coward or a traitor, Martin."

"Well, I think not, mistress, at least not often; but you see here are two duties: the first, to get this money through, the second, to protect the Heer Foy. I wish to know which of these is the more important."

It was Dirk who answered.

"You go to carry out the wishes of my cousin Brant; they must be attended to before anything else."

"Very good," replied Martin; "you quite understand, Heer Foy?"

"Oh! perfectly," replied that young man, grinning.

"Then go to bed for an hour or two, as you may have to keep awake to-morrow night; I will call you at dawn. Your servant, master and mistress, I hope to report myself to you within sixty hours, but if I do not come within eighty, or let us say a hundred, it may be well to make inquiries," and he shuffled back to his den.

Youth sleeps well whatever may be behind or before it, and it was not until Martin had called to him thrice next morning that Foy opened his eyes in the grey light, and, remembering, sprang from his bed.

"There's no hurry," said Martin, "but it will be as well to get out of Leyden before many people are about."

As he spoke Lysbeth entered the room fully dressed, for she had not slept that night, carrying in her hand a little leathern bag.

"How is Adrian, mother?" asked Foy, as she stooped down to kiss him.

"He sleeps, and the doctor, who is still with him, says that he does well," she answered. "But see here, Foy, you are about to start upon your first adventure, and this is my present to you—this and my blessing." Then she untied the neck of the bag and poured from it something that lay upon the table in a shining heap no larger than Martin's fist. Foy took hold of the thing and held it up, whereon the little heap stretched itself out marvellously, till it was as large indeed as the body garment of a man.

"Steel shirt!" exclaimed Martin, nodding his head in approval, and adding, "good wear for those who mix with Spaniards."

"Yes," said Lysbeth, "my father brought this from the East on one of his voyages. I remember he told me that he paid for it its weight in gold and silver, and that even then it was sold to him only by the special favour of the king of that country. The shirt, they said, was ancient, and of such work as cannot now be made. It had been worn from father to son in one family for three hundred years, but no man that wore it ever died by body-cut or thrust, since sword or dagger cannot pierce that steel. At least, son, this is the story, and, strangely enough, when I lost all the rest of my heritage—" and she sighed, "this shirt was left to me, for it lay in its bag in the old oak chest, and none noticed it or thought it worth the taking. So make the most of it, Foy; it is all that remains of your grandfather's fortune, since this house is now your father's."

Beyond kissing his mother in thanks, Foy made no other

answer; he was too much engaged in examining the wonders of the shirt, which as a worker in metals he could well appreciate. But Martin said again:

"Better than money, much better than money. God knew that and made them leave the mail."

"I never saw the like of it," broke in Foy; "look, it runs together like quicksilver, and is light as leather. See, too, it has stood sword and dagger stroke before to-day," and holding it in a sunbeam they perceived in many directions faint lines and spots upon the links caused in past years by the cutting edge of swords and the points of daggers. Yet never a one of those links was severed or broken.

"I pray that it may stand them again if your body be inside of it," said Lysbeth. "Yet, son, remember always that there is One who can guard you better than any human mail however perfect," and she left the room.

Then Foy drew on the coat over his woollen jersey, and it fitted him well, though not so well as in after years, when he had grown thicker. Indeed, when his linen shirt and his doublet were over it none could have guessed that he was clothed in armour of proof.

"It isn't fair, Martin," he said, "that I should be wrapped in steel and you in nothing."

Martin smiled. "Do you take me for a fool, master," he said, "who have seen some fighting in my day, private and public? Look here," and, opening his leathern jerkin, he showed that he was clothed beneath in a strange garment of thick but supple hide.

"Bullskin," said Martin, "tanned as we know how up in Friesland. Not so good as yours, but will turn most cuts or arrows. I sat up last night making one for you, it was almost finished before, but the steel is cooler and better for those who can afford it. Come, let us go and eat; we should be at the gates at eight when they open."

CHAPTER XIII

MOTHER'S GIFTS ARE GOOD GIFTS

At a few minutes to eight that morning a small crowd of people had gathered in front of the Witte Poort at Leyden waiting for the gate to be opened. They were of all sorts, but country folk for the most part, returning to their villages, leading mules and donkeys slung with empty panniers, and shouting greetings through the bars of the gate to acquaintances who led in other mules laden with vegetables and provisions. Among these stood some priests, saturnine and silent, bent, doubtless, upon dark business of their own. A squad of Spanish soldiers waited also, the insolence of the master in their eyes; they were marching to some neighbouring city. There, too, appeared Foy van Goorl and Red Martin, who led a pack mule; Foy dressed in the grey jerkin of a merchant, but armed with a sword and mounted on a good mare; Martin riding a Flemish gelding that nowadays would only have been thought fit for the plough, since no lighter-boned beast could carry his great weight. Among these moved a dapper little man, with sandy whiskers and sly face, asking their business and destination of the various travellers, and under pretence of guarding against the smuggling of forbidden goods, taking count upon his tablets of their merchandise and baggage.

Presently he came to Foy.

"Name?" he said, shortly, although he knew him well enough.

"Foy van Goorl and Martin, his father's servant, travel-

ling to The Hague with specimens of brassware, consigned to the correspondents of our firm," answered Foy, indifferently.

"You are very glib," sneered the sandy-whiskered man; "what is the mule laden with? It may be Bibles for all I know."

"Nothing half so valuable, master," replied Foy; "it is a church chandelier in pieces."

"Unpack it and show me the pieces," said the officer.

Foy flushed with anger and set his teeth, but Martin, administering to him a warning nudge in the ribs, submitted with prompt obedience.

It was a long business, for each arm of the chandelier had been carefully wrapped in hay bands, and the official would not pass them until every one was undone, after which they must be done up again. While the pair of them were engaged upon this tedious and unnecessary task, two fresh travellers arrived at the gate, a long, bony person, clothed in a priest-like garb with a hood that hid the head, and a fierce, dissolute-looking individual of military appearance and armed to the teeth. Catching sight of young van Goorl and his servant, the long person, who seemed to ride very awkwardly with legs thrust forward, whispered something to the soldier man, and they passed on without question through the gate.

When Foy and Martin followed them twenty minutes later, they were out of sight, for the pair were well mounted and rode hard.

"Did you recognise them?" asked Martin so soon as they were clear of the crowd.

"No," said Foy; "who are they?"

"The papist witch, Black Meg, dressed like a man, and the fellow who came here from The Hague yesterday, whither they are going to report that the Heer Adrian

routed them, and that the Broekhovens with the Jufvrouw Elsa got through unsearched."

"What does it all mean, Martin?"

"It means, master, that we shall have a warm welcome yonder; it means that some one guesses we know about this treasure, and that we shan't get the stuff away without trouble."

"Will they waylay us?"

Martin shrugged his shoulders as he answered, "It is always well to be ready, but I think not. Coming back they may waylay us, not going. Our lives are of little use without the money; also they cannot be had for the asking."

Martin was right, for travelling slowly they reached the city without molestation, and, riding to the house of Dirk's correspondent, put up their horses; ate, rested, delivered the sample chandelier, and generally transacted the business which appeared to be the object of their journey. In the course of conversation they learned from their host that things were going very ill here at The Hague for all who were supposed to favour the New Religion. Tortures, burnings, abductions, and murders were of daily occurrence, nor were any brought to judgment for these crimes. Indeed, soldiery, spies, and government agents were quartered on the citizens, doing what they would, and none dared to lift a hand against them. Hendrik Brant, they heard also, was still at large and carrying on business as usual in his shop, though rumour said that he was a marked man whose time would be short.

Foy announced that they would stay the night, and a little after sunset called to Martin to accompany him, as he wished to walk in the Broad Street to see the sights of the town.

"Be careful, Mynheer Foy," said their host in warning, "for there are many strange characters about, men and

women. Oh! yes, this mere is full of pike, and fresh bait is snapped up sharply."

"We will be wary," replied Foy, with the cheerful air of a young man eager for excitement. "Hague pike don't like Leyden perch, you know; they stick in their throats."

"I hope so, I hope so," said the host, "still I pray you be careful. You will remember where to find the horses if you want them; they are fed and I will keep them saddled. Your arrival here is known, and for some reason this house is being watched."

Foy nodded and they started out; Foy going first, and Red Martin, staring round him like a bewildered bumpkin, following at his heel, with his great sword, which was called Silence, girt about his middle, and hidden as much as possible beneath his jerkin.

"I wish you wouldn't look so big, Martin," Foy whispered over his shoulder; "everybody is staring at you and that red beard of yours, which glows like a kitchen fire."

"I can't help it, master," said Martin, "my back aches with stooping as it is, and, as for the beard, well, God made it so."

"At least you might dye it," answered Foy; "if it were black you would be less like a beacon on a church tower."

"Another day, master; it is a long business dyeing a beard like mine; I think it would be quicker to cut it off." Then he stopped, for they were in the Broad Street.

Here they found many people moving to and fro, but although the company were so numerous it was difficult to distinguish them, for no moon shone, and the place was lighted only by lanterns set up on poles at long distances from each other. Foy could see, however, that they were for the most part folk of bad character, disreputable women, soldiers of the garrison, half-drunken sailors from every country, and gliding in and out among them all, priests and other observers of events. Before they had been

long in the crowd a man stumbled against Foy rudely, at the same time telling him to get out of the path. But although his blood leapt at the insult and his hand went to his sword hilt, Foy took no notice, for he understood at once that it was sought to involve him in a quarrel. Next a woman accosted him, a gaily-dressed woman, but she had no bow upon her shoulder, so Foy merely shook his head and smiled. For the rest of that walk, however, he was aware that this woman was watching him, and with her a man whose figure he could not distinguish, for he was wrapped in a black cloak.

Thrice did Foy, followed by Martin, thus promenade the right side of the Broad Street, till he was heartily weary of the game indeed, and began to wonder if his cousin Brant's plans had not miscarried.

As he turned for the fourth time his doubts were answered, for he found himself face to face with a small woman who wore upon her shoulder a large red bow, and was followed by another woman, a buxom person dressed in a peasant's cap. The lady with the red bow, making pretence to stumble, precipitated herself with an affected scream right into his arms, and as he caught her, whispered, "Are you from Leyden, sweetheart?" "Yes." "Then treat me as I treat you, and follow always where I lead. First make pretence to be rid of me."

As she finished whispering Foy heard a warning stamp from Martin, followed by the footsteps of the pair whom he knew were watching them, which he could distinguish easily, for here at the end of the street there were fewer people. So he began to act as best he could—it was not very well, but his awkwardness gave him a certain air of sincerity.

"No, no," he said, "why should I pay for your supper? Come, be going, my good girl, and leave me and my servant to see the town in peace."

"Oh! Mynheer, let me be your guide, I beg you," answered she of the red bow clasping her hands and looking up into his face. Just then he heard the first woman who had accosted him speaking to her companion in a loud voice.

"Look," she said, "Red Bow is trying her best. Ah! my dear, do you think that you'll get a supper out of a holy Leyden ranter, or a skin off an eel for the asking?"

"Oh! he isn't such a selfish fish as he looks," answered Red Bow over her shoulder, while her eyes told Foy that it was his turn to play.

So he played to the best of his ability, with the result that ten minutes later any for whom the sight had interest might have observed a yellow-haired young gallant and a black-haired young woman walking down the Broad Street with their arms affectionately disposed around each other's middles. Following them was a huge and lumbering serving man with a beard like fire, who, in a loyal effort to imitate the actions of his master, had hooked a great limb about the neck of Red Bow's stout little attendant, and held her thus in a chancery which, if flattering, must have been uncomfortable. As Martin explained to the poor woman afterwards, it was no fault of his, since in order to reach her waist he must have carried her under his arm.

Foy and his companion chatted merrily enough, if in a somewhat jerky fashion, but Martin attempted no talk. Only as he proceeded he was heard to mutter between his teeth, "Lucky the Pastor Arentz can't see us now. He would never understand, he is so one-sided." So at least Foy declared subsequently in Leyden.

Presently, at a hint from his lady, Foy turned down a side street, unobserved, as he thought, till he heard a mocking voice calling after them, "Good-night, Red Bow, hope you will have a fine supper with your Leyden shopboy."

"Quick," whispered Red Bow, and they turned another

corner, then another, and another. Now they walked down narrow streets, ill-kept and unsavoury, with sharp pitched roofs, gabled and overhanging so much that here and there they seemed almost to meet, leaving but a narrow ribbon of star-specked sky winding above their heads. Evidently it was a low quarter of the town and a malodorous quarter, for the canals, spanned by picturesque and high-arched bridges, were everywhere, and at this summer season the water in them was low, rotten, and almost stirless.

At length Red Bow halted and knocked upon a small recessed door, which instantly was opened by a man who bore no light.

"Come in," he whispered, and all four of them passed into a darksome passage. "Quick, quick!" said the man, "I hear footsteps."

Foy heard them also echoing down the empty street, and as the door closed it seemed to him that they stopped in the deep shadow of the houses. Then, holding each other by the hand, they crept along black passages and down stairs till at length they saw light shining through the crevices of an ill-fitting door. It opened mysteriously at their approach, and when they had all entered, shut behind them.

Foy uttered a sigh of relief for he was weary of this long flight, and looked round him to discover that they were in a large windowless cellar, well furnished after a fashion by oak benches and a table set out with cold meats and flagons of wine. At the foot of this table stood a middle-aged man, prematurely grey, and with a face worn as though by constant care.

"Welcome, Foy van Goorl," said the man in a gentle voice. "Many years have passed since last we met; still I should have known you anywhere, though I think you would not have known me."

Foy looked at him and shook his head.

"I thought so," went on the man with a smile. "Well,

I am Hendrik Brant, your cousin, once the burgomaster of The Hague and its richest citizen, but to-day a hunted rat who must receive his guests in secret cellars. Tell me now, did my daughter, Elsa, reach your good father's house in safety, and is she well?"

So Foy told him all that story.

"As I thought, as I thought," said Hendrik. "Ramiro knew of her journey and guessed that she might carry some letter. Oh!" he went on, shaking his fist in a kind of frenzy, and addressing the two women who had played the parts of Red Bow and her servant, "who among you is the traitor? Can it be that you, whom my bounty has fed, betray me? Nay, girls, do not weep, I know that it is not so, and yet, in this city, the very walls have ears, yes, even this deep vault gives up its secrets. Well, if only I can save my fortune from those wolves, what do I care? Then they may take my carcase and tear it. At least, my daughter is safe—for a while, and now I have but one desire left on earth—to rob them of my wealth also."

Then he turned to the girl decked out in the gay clothes, who, now that the chase was over, sat upon a bench with her face hidden in her hand, and said, "Tell me your story, Gretchen," whereon she lifted her head and repeated all that happened.

"They press us hard," muttered Brant, "but, friends, we will beat them yet. Eat now, and drink while you may."

So they sat down and ate and drank while Hendrick watched them, and the man who had led them to the vault listened without the door.

When they had finished, Brant bade the two women, Red Bow and the other, leave the cellar and send in the sentry, replacing him as guards. He entered, a hard-faced, grizzled man, and, taking a seat at the table, began to fill himself with food and wine.

"Hearken, my cousin Foy," said Brant presently, "this

is the plan. A league away, near to the mouth of the great canal, lie certain boats, a score or over of them, laden with trading goods and timber, in the charge of honest men who know nothing of their cargo, but who have orders to fire them if they should be boarded. Among these boats is one called the *Swallow*, small, but the swiftest on this coast, and handy in a sea. Her cargo is salt, and beneath it eight kegs of powder, and between the powder and the salt certain barrels, which barrels are filled with treasure. Now, presently, if you have the heart for it—and if you have not, say so, and I will go myself—this man here, Hans, under cover of the darkness, will row you down to the boat *Swallow*. Then you must board her, and at the first break of dawn hoist her great sail and stand out to sea, and away with her where the wind drives, tying the skiff behind. Like enough you will find foes waiting for you at the mouth of the canal, or elsewhere. Then I can give you only one counsel—get out with the *Swallow* if you can, and if you cannot, escape in the skiff or by swimming, but before you leave her fire the slow-matches that are ready at the bow and the stern, and let the powder do its work and blow my wealth to the waters and the winds. Will you do it? Think, think well before you answer."

"Did we not come out from Leyden to be at your command, cousin?" said Foy smiling. Then he added, "But why do you not accompany us on this adventure? You are in danger here, and even if we get clear with the treasure, what use is money without life?"

"To me none, any way," answered Brant; "but you do not understand. I live in the midst of spies, I am watched day and night; although I came here disguised and secretly, it is probable that even my presence in this house is known. More, there is an order out that if I attempt to leave the town by land or water, I am to be seized, whereon my house will be searched instantly, and it will be found that my

bullion is gone. Think, lad, how great is this wealth, and you will understand why the crows are hungry. It is talked of throughout the Netherlands, it has been reported to the King in Spain, and I learn that orders have come from him concerning its seizure. But there is another band who would get hold of it first, Ramiro and his crew, and that is why I have been left safe so long, because the thieves strive one against the other and watch each other. Most of all, however, they watch me and everything that is mine. For though they do not believe that I should send the treasure away and stay behind, yet they are not sure."

"You think that they will pursue us then?" asked Foy.

"For certain. Messengers arrived from Leyden to announce your coming two hours before you set foot in the town, and it will be wonderful indeed if you leave it without a band of cut-throats at your heels. Be not deceived, lad, this business is no light one."

"You say the little boat sails fast, master?" queried Martin.

"She sails fast, but perhaps others are as swift. Moreover, it may happen that you will find the mouth of the canal blocked by the guardship, which was sent there a week ago with orders to search every craft that passes from stem to stern. Or—you may slip past her."

"My master and I are not afraid of a few blows," said Martin, "and we are ready to take our risks like brave men; still, Mynheer Brant, this seems to me a hazardous business, and one in which your money may well get itself lost. Now, I ask you, would it not be better to take this treasure out of the boat where you have hidden it, and bury it, and convey it away by land?"

Brant shook his head. "I have thought of that," he said, "as I have thought of everything, but it cannot now be done; also there is no time to make fresh plans."

"Why?" asked Foy.

"Because day and night men are watching the boats which are known to belong to me, although they are registered in other names, and only this evening an order was signed that they must be searched within an hour of dawn. My information is good, as it should be since I pay for it dearly."

"Then," said Foy, "there is nothing more to be said. We will try to get to the boat and try to get her away; and if we can get her away we will try to hide the treasure, and if we can't we will try to blow her up as you direct and try to escape ourselves. Or—" and he shrugged his shoulders.

Martin said nothing, only he shook his great red head, nor did the silent pilot at the table speak at all.

Hendrik Brant looked at them, and his pale, careworn face began to work. "Have I the right?" he muttered to himself, and for an instant or two bent his head as though in prayer. When he lifted it again his mind seemed to be made up.

"Foy van Goorl," he said, "listen to me, and tell your father, my cousin and executor, what I say, since I have no time to write it; tell him word for word. You are wondering why I do not let this pelf take its chance without risking the lives of men to save it. It is because something in my heart pushes me to another path. It may be imagination, but I am a man standing on the edge of the grave, and to such I have known it given to see the future. I think that you will win through with the treasure, Foy, and that it will be the means of bringing some wicked ones to their doom. Yes, and more, much more, but what it is I cannot altogether see. Yet I am quite certain that thousands and tens of thousands of our folk will live to bless the gold of Hendrik Brant, and that is why I work so hard to save it from the Spaniards. Also that is why I ask you to risk your lives to-night; not for the wealth's sake, for

wealth is dross, but for what the wealth will buy in days to come."

He paused a while, then went on: "I think also, cousin, that being, they tell me, unaffianced, you will learn to love, and not in vain, that dear child of mine, whom I leave in your father's keeping and in yours. More, since time is short and we shall never meet again, I say to you plainly, that the thought is pleasing to me, young cousin Foy, for I have a good report of you and like your blood and looks. Remember always, however dark may be your sky, that before he passed to doom Hendrik Brant had this vision concerning you and the daughter whom he loves, and whom you will learn to love as do all who know her. Remember also that priceless things are not lightly won, and do not woo her for her fortune, since, I tell you, this belongs not to her but to our people and our cause, and when the hour comes, for them it must be used."

Foy listened wondering, but he made no answer, for he knew not what to say. Yet now, on the edge of his first great adventure, these words were comfortable to him who had found already that Elsa's eyes were bright. Brant next turned towards Martin, but that worthy shook his red beard and stepped back a pace.

"Thank you kindly, master," he said, "but I will do without the prophecies, which, good or ill, are things that fasten upon a man's mind. Once an astrologer cast my nativity, and foretold that I should be drowned before I was twenty-five. I wasn't, but, my faith! the miles which I have walked round to bridges on account of that astrologer."

Brant smiled. "I have no foresight concerning you, good friend, except that I judge your arm will be always strong in battle; that you will love your masters well, and use your might to avenge the cause of God's slaughtered saints upon their murderers."

Martin nodded his head vigorously, and fumbled at the handle of the sword Silence, while Brant went on :

"Friend, you have entered on a dangerous quarrel on behalf of me and mine, and if you live through it you will have earned high pay."

Then he went to the table, and, taking writing materials, he wrote as follows : "To the Heer Dirk van Goorl and his heirs, the executors of my will, and the holders of my fortune, which is to be used as God shall show them. This is to certify that in payment of this night's work Martin, called the Red, the servant of the said Dirk van Goorl, or those heirs whom he may appoint, is entitled to a sum of five thousand florins, and I constitute such sum a first charge upon my estate, to whatever purpose they may put it in their discretion." This document he dated, signed, and caused the pilot Hans to sign also as a witness. Then he gave it to Martin, who thanked him by touching his forehead, remarking at the same time—

"After all, fighting is not a bad trade if you only stick to it long enough. Five thousand florins ! I never thought to earn so much."

"You haven't got it yet," interrupted Foy. "And now, what are you going to do with that paper ? "

Martin reflected. "Coat ? " he said, "no, a man takes off his coat if it is hot, and it might be left behind. Boots ? —no, that would wear it out, especially if they got wet. Jersey ?—sewn next the skin, no, same reason. Ah! I have it," and, drawing out the great sword Silence, he took the point of his knife and began to turn a little silver screw in the hilt, one of many with which the handle of walrus ivory was fastened to its steel core. The screw came out, and he touched a spring, whereon one quarter of the ivory casing fell away, revealing a considerable hollow in the hilt, for, although Martin grasped it with one hand, the sword was made to be held by two.

"What is that hole for?" asked Foy.

"The executioner's drug," replied Martin, "which makes a man happy while he does his business with him, that is, if he can pay the fee. He offered his dose to me, I remember, before—" Here Martin stopped, and, having rolled up the parchment, hid it in the hollow.

"You might lose your sword," suggested Foy.

"Yes, master, when I lose my life and exchange the hope of florins for a golden crown," replied Martin with a grin. "Till then I do not intend to part with Silence."

Meanwhile Hendrik Brant had been whispering to the quiet man at the table, who now rose and said:

"Foster-brother, do not trouble about me; I take my chance and I do not wish to survive you. My wife is burnt, one of my girls out there is married to a man who knows how to protect them both, also the dowries you gave them are far away and safe. Do not trouble about me who have but one desire—to snatch the great treasure from the maw of the Spaniard that in a day to come it may bring doom upon the Spaniard." Then he relapsed into a silence, which spread over the whole company.

"It is time to be stirring," said Brant presently. "Hans, you will lead the way. I must bide here a while before I go abroad and show myself."

The pilot nodded. "Ready?" he asked, addressing Foy and Martin. Then he went to the door and whistled, whereon Red Bow with her pretended servant entered the vault. He spoke a word or two to them and kissed them each upon the brow. Next he went to Hendrik Brant, and throwing his arms about him, embraced him with far more passion than he had shown towards his own daughters.

"Farewell, foster-brother," he said, "till we meet again here or hereafter—it matters little which. Have no fear, we will get the stuff through to England if may be, or send



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FOY TURNED TO LOOK AT HENDRIK BRANT

it to hell with some Spaniards to seek it there. Now, comrades, come on and stick close to me, and if any try to stop us cut them down. When we reach the boat do you take the oars and row while I steer her. The girls come with us to the canal, arm-in-arm with the two of you. If anything happens to me either of them can steer you to the skiff called *Swallow,* but if naught happens we will put them ashore at the next wharf. Come," and he led the way from the cellar.

At the threshold Foy turned to look at Hendrik Brant. He was standing by the table, the light shining full upon his pale face and grizzled head, about which it seemed to cast a halo. Indeed, at that moment, wrapped in his long, dark cloak, his lips moving in prayer, and his arms uplifted to bless them as they went, he might well have been, not a man, but some vision of a saint come back to earth. The door closed and Foy never saw him again, for ere long the Inquisition seized him and a while afterwards he died beneath their cruel hands. One of the charges against him was, that more than twenty years before, he had been seen reading the Bible at Leyden by Black Meg, who appeared and gave the evidence. But they did not discover where his treasure was hidden away. To win an easier death, indeed, he made them a long confession that took them a still longer journey, but of the truth of the matter he knew nothing, and therefore could tell them nothing.

Now this scene, so strange and pathetic, ended at last, the five of them were in the darkness of the street. Here once more Foy and Red Bow clung to each other, and once more the arm of Martin was about the neck of her who seemed to be the serving-maid, while ahead, as though he were paid to show the way, went the pilot. Soon footsteps were heard, for folk were after them. They turned once, they turned twice, they reached the bank of a canal, and Hans, followed by Red Bow and her sister, descended

some steps and climbed into a boat which lay there ready. Next came Martin, and, last of all, Foy. As he set foot upon the first step, a figure shot out of the gloom towards him, a knife gleamed in the air and a blow took him between the shoulders that sent him tumbling headlong, for he was balanced upon the edge of the step.

But Martin had heard and seen. He swung round and struck out with the sword Silence. The assassin was far from him, still the tip of the long steel reached the outstretched murderous hand, and from it fell a broken knife, while he who held it sped on with a screech of pain. Martin darted back and seized the knife, then he leapt into the boat and pushed off. At the bottom of it lay Foy, who had fallen straight into the arms of Red Bow, dragging her down with him.

"Are you hurt, master?" asked Martin.

"Not a bit," replied Foy, "but I am afraid the lady is. She went undermost."

"Mother's gifts are good gifts!" muttered Martin as he pulled him and the girl, whose breath had been knocked out of her, up to a seat. "You ought to have an eight-inch hole through you, but that knife broke upon the shirt. Look here," and he threw the handle of the dagger on to his knees and snatched at the sculls.

Foy examined it in the faint light, and there, still hooked above the guard, was a single severed finger, a long and skinny finger, to which the point of the sword Silence had played surgeon, and on it a gold ring. "This may be useful," thought Foy, as he slipped handle and finger into the pocket of his cloak.

Then they all took oars and rowed till presently they drew near a wharf.

"Now, daughters, make ready," said Hans, and the girls stood up. As they touched the wharf Red Bow bent down and kissed Foy.

"The rest were in play, this is in earnest," she said, "and for luck. Good-night, companion, and think of me sometimes."

"Good-night, companion," answered Foy, returning the kiss. Then she left ashore. They never met again.

"You know what to do, girls," said Hans; "do it, and in three days you should be safe in England, where, perhaps, I may meet you, though do not count on that. Whatever happens, keep honest, and remember me till we come together again, here or hereafter, but, most of all, remember your mother and your benefactor Hendrik Brant. Farewell."

"Farewell, father," they answered with a sob, and the boat drifted off down the dark canal, leaving the two of them alone upon the wharf. Afterwards Foy discovered that it was the short sister who walked with Martin that was married. Gallant little Red Bow married also, but later. Her husband was a cloth merchant in London, and her grandson became Lord Mayor of that city.

And now, having played their part in it, these two brave girls are out of the story.

CHAPTER XIV

SWORD SILENCE RECEIVES THE SECRET

For half an hour or more they glided down the canal unmolested and in silence. Now it ran into a broader waterway along which they slid towards the sea, keeping as much as possible under the shadow of one bank, for although the night was moonless a faint grey light lay upon the surface of the stream. At length Foy became aware that they were bumping against the sides of a long line of barges and river boats laden with timber and other goods. To one of these—it was the fourth—the pilot Hans made fast, tying their row-boat to her stern. Then he climbed to the deck, whispering to them to follow.

As they scrambled on board, two grey figures arose and Foy saw the flash of steel. Then Hans whistled like a plover, and dropping their swords they came to him and fell into talk. Presently Hans left them, and, returning to Foy and Martin, said :

"Listen: we must lie here a while, for the wind is against us, and it would be too dangerous for us to try to row or pole so big a boat down to the sea and across the bar in the darkness, for most likely we should set her fast upon a shoal. Before dawn it will turn, and, if I read the sky aright, blow hard off land."

"What have the bargemen to say?" asked Foy.

"Only that for these four days they have been lying here forbidden to move, and that their craft are to be searched to-morrow by a party of soldiers, and the cargo taken out of them piecemeal."

"So," said Foy, "well, I hope that by then what they seek will be far away. Now show us this ship."

Then Hans took them down the hatchway, for the little vessel was decked, being in shape and size not unlike a modern Norfolk herring boat, though somewhat more slightly built. Then having lit a lantern, he showed them the cargo. On the top were bags of salt. Dragging one or two of these aside, Hans uncovered the heads of five barrels, each of them marked with the initial *B* in white paint.

"That is what men will die for before to-morrow night," he said.

"The treasure?" asked Foy.

He nodded. "These five, none of the others." Then still lower down he pointed out other barrels, eight of them, filled with the best gunpowder, and showed them too where the slow matches ran to the little cabin, the cook's galley, the tiller and the prow, by means of any one of which it could be fired. After this and such inspection of the ropes and sails as the light would allow, they sat in the cabin waiting till the wind should change, while the two watchmen unmoored the vessel and made her sails ready for hoisting. An hour passed, and still the breeze blew from the sea, but in uncertain chopping gusts. Then it fell altogether.

"Pray God it comes soon," said Martin, "for the owner of that finger in your pocket will have laid the hounds on to our slot long ago, and, look! the east grows red."

The silent, hard-faced Hans leant forward and stared up the darkling water, his hand behind his ear.

"I hear them," he said presently.

"Who?" asked Foy.

"The Spaniards and the wind—both," he answered. "Come, up with the mainsail and pole her out to midsteam."

So the three of them took hold of the tackle and ran aft

with it, while the rings and booms creaked and rattled as the great canvas climbed the mast. Presently it was set, and after it the jib. Then, assisted by the two watchmen thrusting from another of the boats, they pushed the *Swallow* from her place in the line out into mid-stream. But all this made noise and took time, and now men appeared upon the bank, calling to know who dared to move the boats without leave. As no one gave them any answer, they fired a shot, and presently a beacon began to burn upon a neighbouring mound.

"Bad business," said Hans, shrugging his shoulders. "They are warning the Government ship at the harbour mouth. Duck, masters, duck; here comes the wind," and he sprang to the tiller as the boom swung over and the little vessel began to gather way.

"Yes," said Martin, "and here with it come the Spaniards."

Foy looked. Through the grey mist that was growing lighter every moment, for the dawn was breaking, he caught sight of a long boat with her canvas spread which was sweeping round the bend of the stream towards them and not much more than a quarter of a mile away.

"They have had to pole down stream in the dark, and that is why they have been so long in coming," said Hans over his shoulder.

"Well, they are here now at any rate," answered Foy, "and plenty of them," he added, as a shout from a score of throats told them that they were discovered.

But now the *Swallow* had begun to fly, making the water hiss upon either side of her bows.

"How far is it to the sea?" asked Foy.

"About three miles," Hans called back from the tiller. "With this wind we should be there in fifteen minutes. Master," he added presently, "bid your man light the fire in the galley."



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HEEDLESS OF THEIR BULLETS, HANS THE PILOT ROSE TO HIS FEET AGAIN

"What for," asked Foy, "to cook breakfast?"

The pilot shrugged his shoulders and muttered, "Yes, if we live to eat it." But Foy saw that he was glancing at the slow-match by his side, and understood.

Ten minutes passed, and they had swept round the last bend and were in the stretch of open water which ran down to the sea. By now the light was strong, and in it they saw that the signal fire had not been lit in vain. At the mouth of the cutting, just where the bar began, the channel was narrowed in with earth to a width of not more than fifty paces, and on one bank of it stood a fort armed with culverins. Out of the little harbour of this fort a large open boat was being poled, and in it a dozen or fifteen soldiers were hastily arming themselves.

"What now?" cried Martin. "They are going to stop the mouth of the channel."

The hard-featured Hans set his teeth and made no answer. Only he looked backward at his pursuers and onward at those who barred the way. Presently he called aloud:

"Under hatches, both of you. They are going to fire from the fort," and he flung himself upon his back, steering with his uplifted arms.

Foy and Martin tumbled down the hatchway, for they could do no good on deck. Only Foy kept one eye above its level.

"Look out!" he said, and ducked.

As he spoke there was a puff of white smoke from the fort, followed by the scream of a shot which passed ahead of them. Then came another puff of smoke, and a hole appeared in their brown sail. After this the fort did not fire again, for the gunners found no time to load their pieces, only some soldiers who were armed with arquebuses began to shoot as the boat swept past within a few yards of them. Heedless of their bullets, Hans the pilot rose to his

feet again, for such work as was before him could not be done by a man lying on his back. By now the large open boat from the fort was within two hundred yards of them, and, driven by the gathering gale, the *Swallow* rushed towards it with the speed of a dart. Foy and Martin crawled from the hatchway and lay down near the steersman under the shelter of the little bulwarks, watching the enemy's boat, which was in midstream just where the channel was narrowest, and on the hither side of the broken water of the bar.

"See," said Foy, "they are throwing out anchors fore and aft. Is there room to go past them?"

"No," answered Hans, "the water is too shallow under the bank, and they know it. Bring me a burning brand."

Foy crept forward, and returned with the fire.

"Now light the slow-match, master."

Foy opened his blue eyes and a cold shiver went down his back. Then he set his teeth and obeyed. Martin looked at Hans, muttering,

"Good for a young one!"

Hans nodded and said, "Have no fear. Till that match burns to the level of the deck we are safe. Now, mates, hold fast. I can't go past that boat, so I am going through her. We may sink on the other side, though I am sure that the fire will reach the powder first. In that case you can swim for it if you like, but I shall go with the *Swallow*."

"I will think about it when the time comes. Oh! that cursed astrologer," growled Martin, looking back at the pursuing ship, which was not more than seven or eight hundred yards away.

Meanwhile the officer in command of the boat, who was armed with a musket, was shouting to them to pull down their sail and surrender; indeed, not until they were

within fifty yards of him did he seem to understand their desperate purpose. Then some one in the boat called out: "The devils are going to sink us," and there was a rush to bow and stern to get up the anchors. Only the officer stood firm, screaming at them like a madman. It was too late; a strong gust of wind caught the *Swallow*, causing her to heel over and sweep down on the boat like a swooping falcon.

Hans stood and shifted the tiller ever so little, calculating all things with his eye. Foy watched the boat towards which they sprang like a thing alive, and Martin, lying at his side, watched the burning match.

Suddenly the Spanish officer, when their prow was not more than twenty paces from him, ceased to shout, and lifting his piece fired. Martin, looking upwards with his left eye, thought that he saw Hans flinch, but the pilot made no sound. Only he did something to the tiller, putting all his strength on to it, and it seemed to the pair of them as though the *Swallow* was for an instant checked in her flight—certainly her prow appeared to lift itself from the water. Suddenly there was a sound of something snapping—a sound that could be heard even through the yell of terror from the soldiers in the boat. It was the bowsprit which had gone, leaving the jib flying loose like a great pennon.

Then came the crash. Foy shut his eyes for a moment, hanging on with both hands till the scraping and the trembling were done with. Now he opened them again, and the first thing he saw was the body of the Spanish officer hanging from the jagged stump of the bowsprit. He looked behind. The boat had vanished, but in the water were to be seen the heads of three or four men swimming. As for themselves they seemed to be clear and unhurt, except for the loss of their bowsprit; indeed, the little vessel was riding over the seas on the bar like any swan. Hans glanced at

the slow-match which was smouldering away perilously near to the deck, whereon Martin stamped upon it, saying :

"If we sink now it will be in deep water, so there is no need to fly up before we go down."

"Go and see if she leaks," said Hans.

They went and searched the forehold but could not find that the *Swallow* had taken any harm worth noting. Indeed, her massive oaken prow, with the weight of the gale-driven ship behind it, had crashed through the frail sides of the open Spanish boat like a knife through an egg.

"That was good steering," said Foy to Hans, when they returned, "and nothing seems to be amiss."

Hans nodded. "I hit him neatly," he muttered. "Look. He's gone." As he spoke the *Swallow* gave a sharp pitch, and the corpse of the Spaniard fell with a heavy splash into the sea.

"I am glad it has sunk," said Foy; "and now let's have some breakfast, for I am starving. Shall I bring you some, friend Hans?"

"No, master, I want to sleep."

Something in the tone of the man's voice caused Foy to scrutinise his face. His lips were turning blue. He glanced at his hands. Although they still grasped the tiller tightly, these also were turning blue, as though with cold; moreover, blood was dropping on the deck.

"You are hit," he said. "Martin, Martin, Hans is hit!"

"Yes," replied the man, "he hit me and I hit him, and perhaps presently we shall be talking it over together. No, don't trouble, it is through the body and mortal. Well, I expected nothing less, so I can't complain. Now, listen, while my strength holds. Can you lay a course for Harwich in England?"

Martin and Foy shook their heads. Like most Hollanders they were good sailormen, but they only knew their own coasts.

"Then you had best not try it," said Hans, "for there is a gale brewing, and you will be driven on the Goodwin Sands, or somewhere down that shore, and drowned and the treasure lost. Run up to the Haarlem Mere, comrades. You can hug the land with this small boat, while that big devil after you," and he nodded towards the pursuing vessel, which by now was crossing the bar, "must stand further out beyond the shoals. Then slip up through the small gut—the ruined farmstead marks it—and so into the mere. You know Mother Martha, the mad woman who is nicknamed the Mare? She will be watching at the mouth of it; she always is. Moreover, I caused her to be warned that we might pass her way, and if you hoist the white flag with a red cross—it lies in the locker—or, after nightfall, hang out four lamps upon your starboard side, she will come aboard to pilot you, for she knows this boat well. To her also you can tell your business without fear, for she will help you, and be secret as the dead. Then bury the treasure, or sink it, or blow it up, or do what you can, but, in the name of God, to whom I go, I charge you do not let it fall into the hands of Ramiro and his Spanish rats who are at your heels."

As Hans spoke he sank down upon the deck. Foy ran to support him, but he pushed him aside with a feeble hand. "Let me be," he whispered. "I wish to pray. I have set you the course. Follow it to the end."

Then Martin took the tiller while Foy watched Hans. In ten minutes he was dead.

Now they were running northwards with a fierce wind abeam of them, and the larger Spanish ship behind, but standing further out to sea to avoid the banks. Half an hour later the wind, which was gathering to a gale, shifted several points to the north, so that they must beat up against it under reefed canvas. Still they held on without accident, Foy attending to the sail and Martin steering.

The *Swallow* was a good sea boat, and if their progress was slow so was that of their pursuer, which dogged them continually, sometimes a mile away and sometimes less. At length, towards evening, they caught sight of a ruined house that marked the channel of the little gut, one of the outlets of the Haarlem Mere.

"The sea runs high upon the bar and it is ebb tide," said Foy.

"Even so we must try it, master," answered Martin. "Perhaps she will scrape through," and he put the *Swallow* about and ran for the mouth of the gut.

Here the waves were mountainous, and much water came aboard. Moreover, three times they bumped upon the bar, till at length, to their joy, they found themselves in the calm stream of the gut, and, by shifting the sail, were able to draw up it, though very slowly.

"At least we have got a start of them," said Foy, "for they can never get across until the tide rises."

"We shall need it all," answered Martin; "so now hoist the white flag and let us eat while we may."

While they ate the sun sank, and the wind blew so that scarcely could they make a knot an hour, shift the sail as they might. Then, as there was no sign of Mother Martha, or any other pilot, they hung out the four lamps upon the starboard side, and, with a flapping sail, drifted on gradually, till at length they reached the mouth of the great mere, an infinite waste of waters—deep in some places, shallow in others, and spotted everywhere with islets. Now the wind turned against them altogether, and, the darkness closing in, they were forced to drop anchor, fearing lest otherwise they should go ashore. One comfort they had, however: as yet nothing could be seen of their pursuers.

Then, for the first time, their spirits failed them a little, and they stood together near the stern wondering

what they should do. It was while they rested thus that suddenly a figure appeared before them as though it had risen from the deck of the ship. No sound of oars or footsteps had reached their ears, yet there, outlined against the dim sky, was the figure.

"I think that friend Hans has come to life again," said Martin with a slight quaver in his voice, for Martin was terribly afraid of ghosts.

"And I think that a Spaniard has found us," said Foy, drawing his knife.

Then a hoarse voice spoke, saying, "Who are you that signal for a pilot on my waters?"

"The question is—who are you?" answered Foy, "and be so good as to tell us quickly."

"I am the pilot," said the voice, "and this boat by the rig of her and her signals should be the *Swallow* of The Hague, but why must I crawl aboard of her across the corpse of a dead man?"

"Come into the cabin, pilot, and we will tell you," said Foy.

"Very well, Mynheer." So Foy led the way to the cabin, but Martin stopped behind awhile.

"We have found our guide, so what is the use of the lamps?" he said to himself as he extinguished them all, except one which he brought with him into the cabin. Foy was waiting for him by the door and they entered the place together. At the end of it the light of the lamp showed them a strange figure clad in skins so shapeless and sack-like that it was impossible to say whether the form beneath were male or female. The figure was bareheaded, and about the brow locks of grizzled hair hung in tufts. The face, in which were set a pair of wandering grey eyes, was deep cut, tanned brown by exposure, scarred, and very ugly, with withered lips and projecting teeth.

"Good even to you, Dirk van Goorl's son, and to you,

Red Martin. I am Mother Martha, she whom the Spaniards call the Mare and the Lake-witch."

"Little need to tell us that, mother," said Foy, "although it is true that many years have gone by since I set eyes on you."

Martha smiled grimly as she answered, "Yes, many years. Well, what have you fat Leyden burghers to do with a poor old night-hag, except of course in times of trouble? Not that I blame you, for it is not well that you, or your parents either, should be known to traffic with such as I. Now, what is your business with me, for the signals show that you have business, and why does the corpse of Hendrik Brant's foster-brother lie there in the stern?"

"Because, to be plain, we have Hendrik Brant's treasure on board, mother, and for the rest look yonder—" and he pointed to what his eye had just caught sight of two or three miles away, a faint light, too low and too red for a star, that could only come from a lantern hung at the masthead of a ship.

Martha nodded. "Spaniards after you, poling through the gut against the wind. Come on, there is no time to lose. Bring your boat round, and we will tow the *Swallow* to where she will lie safe to-night."

Five minutes later they were all three of them rowing the oar boat in which they had escaped from The Hague towards some unknown point in the darkness, slowly dragging after them the little ship *Swallow*. As they went, Foy told Martha all the story of their mission and escape.

"I have heard of this treasure before," she said, "all the Netherlands has heard of Brant's hoard. Also dead Hans there let me know that perhaps it might come this way, for in such matters he thought that I could be trusted," and she smiled grimly. "And now what would you do?"

"Fulfil our orders," said Foy. "Hide it if we can; if not, destroy it."

"Better the first than the last," interrupted Martin. "Hide the treasure, say I, and destroy the Spaniards, if Mother Martha here can think of a plan."

"We might sink the ship," suggested Foy.

"And leave her mast for a beacon," added Martin sarcastically.

"Or put the stuff into the boat and sink that."

"And never find it again in this great sea," objected Martin.

All this while Martha steered the boat as calmly as though it were daylight. They had left the open water, and were passing slowly in and out among islets, yet she never seemed to be doubtful or to hesitate. At length they felt the *Swallow* behind them take the mud gently, whereon Martha led the way aboard of her and threw out the anchor, saying that here was her berth for the night.

"Now," she said, "bring up this gold and lay it in the boat, for if you would save it there is much to do before dawn."

So Foy and Martin went down while Martha, hanging over the hatchway, held the lighted lamp above them, since they dared not take it near the powder. Moving the bags of salt, soon they came to the five barrels of treasure marked B, and, strong though they were, it was no easy task for the pair of them by the help of a pulley to sling them over the ship's side into the boat. At last it was done, and the place of the barrels having been filled with salt bags, they took two iron spades which were provided for such a task as this, and started, Martha steering as before. For an hour or more they rowed in and out among endless islands, at the dim shores of which Martha stared as they passed, till at length she motioned to them to ship their oars, and they touched ground.

Leaping from the boat she made it fast and vanished

among the reeds to reconnoitre. Presently she returned again, saying that this was the place. Then began the heavy labour of rolling the casks of treasure for thirty yards or more along otter paths that pierced the dense growth of reeds.

Now, having first carefully cut out reed sods in a place chosen by Martha, Foy and Martin set to their task of digging a great hole by the light of the stars. Hard indeed they toiled at it, yet had it not been for the softness of the marshy soil, they could not have got done while the night lasted, for the grave that would contain those barrels must be both wide and deep. After three feet of earth had been removed, they came to the level of the lake, and for the rest of the time worked in water, throwing up shovelfuls of mud. Still at last it was done, and the five barrels standing side by side in the water were covered up with soil and roughly planted over with the reed turf.

"Let us be going," said Martha. "There is no time to lose." So they straightened their backs and wiped the sweat from their brows.

"There is earth lying about, which may tell its story," said Martin.

"Yes," she replied, "if any see it within the next ten days, after which in this damp place the mosses will have hidden it."

"Well, we have done our best," said Foy, as he washed his mud-stained boots in the water, "and now the stuff must take its chance."

Then once more they entered the boat and rowed away somewhat wearily, Martha steering them.

On they went and on, till Foy, tired out, nearly fell asleep at his oar. Suddenly Martha tapped him on the shoulder. He looked up and there, not two hundred yards away, its tapering mast showing dimly against the sky, was the vessel that had pursued them from The Hague, a single

lantern burning on its stern. Martha looked and grunted; then she leant forward and whispered to them imperiously.

"It is madness," gasped Martin.

"Do as I bid you," she hissed, and they let the boat drift with the wind till it came to a little island within thirty yards of the anchored vessel, an island with a willow tree growing upon its shore. "Hold to the twigs of the tree," she muttered, "and wait till I come again." Not knowing what else to do, they obeyed.

Then Martha rose and they saw that she had slipped off her garment of skins, and stood before them, a gaunt white figure armed with a gleaming knife. Next she put the knife to her mouth, and, nipping it between her teeth, slid into the water silently as a diving bird. A minute passed, not more, and they saw that something was climbing up the cable of the ship.

"What is she going to do?" whispered Foy.

"God in Heaven knows," answered Martin, "but if she does not come back good-bye to Heer Brant's treasure, for she alone can find it again."

They waited, holding their breaths, till presently a curious choking sound floated to them, and the lantern on the ship vanished. Two minutes later a hand with a knife in it appeared over the gunwale of the boat, followed by a grey head. Martin put out his great arm and lifted, and, lo! the white form slid down between them like a big salmon turned out of a net.

"Put about and row," it gasped, and they obeyed while the Mare clothed herself again in her skin garment.

"What have you done?" asked Foy.

"Something," she replied with a fierce chuckle. "I have stabbed the watchman—he thought I was a ghost, and was too frightened to call out. I have cut the cable, and I think that I have fired the ship. Ah! look! but row—row round the corner of the island."

They gave way, and as they turned the bank of reeds glanced behind them, to see a tall tongue of fire shooting up the cordage of the ship, and to hear a babel of frightened and angry voices.

Ten minutes later they were on board the *Swallow*, and from her deck watching the fierce flare of the burning Spanish vessel nearly a mile away. Here they ate and drank, for they needed food badly.

"What shall we do now?" asked Foy when they had finished.

"Nothing at present," answered Martha, "but give me pen and paper."

They found them, and having shrouded the little window of the cabin, she sat at the table and very slowly but with much skill drew a plan, or rather a picture, of this portion of the Haarlem Mere. In that plan were marked many islands according to their natural shapes, twenty of them perhaps, and upon one of these she set a cross.

"Take it and hide it," said Martha, when it was finished, "so that if I die you may know where to dig for Brant's gold. With this in your hand you cannot fail to find it, for I draw well. Remember that it lies thirty paces due south of the only spot where it is easy to land upon that island."

"What shall I do with this picture which is worth so much?" said Foy helplessly, "for in truth I fear to keep the thing."

"Give it to me, master," said Martin; "the secret of the treasure may as well lie with the legacy that is charged on it." Then once more he unscrewed the handle of the sword Silence, and having folded up the paper and wrapped it round with a piece of linen, he thrust it away into the hollow hilt.

"Now that sword is worth more than some people might think," Martin said as he restored it to the scabbard, "but

I hope that those who come to seek its secret may have to travel up its blade. Well, when shall we be moving?"

"Listen," said Martha. "Would you two men dare a great deed upon those Spaniards? Their ship is burnt, but there are a score or over of them, and they have two large boats. Now at the dawn they will see the mast of this vessel and attack it in the boats thinking to find the treasure. Well, if as they win aboard we can manage to fire the matches——"

"There may be fewer Spaniards left to plague us," suggested Foy.

"And believing it to be blown up no one will trouble about that money further," added Martin. "Oh! the plan is good, but dangerous. Come, let us talk it over."

The dawn broke in a flood of yellow light on the surface of the Haarlem Mere. Presently from the direction of the Spanish vessel, which was still burning sullenly, came a sound of beating oars. Now the three watchers in the *Swallow* saw two boatloads of armed men, one of them with a small sail set, swooping down towards them. When they were within a hundred yards Martha muttered, "It is time," and Foy ran hither and thither with a candle firing the slow-matches; also to make sure he cast the candle among a few handfuls of oil-soaked shreds of canvas that lay ready at the bottom of the hatchway. Then with the others, without the Spaniards being able to see them, he slipped over the side of the little vessel into the shallow water that was clothed with tall reeds, and waded through it to the island.

Once on firm land, they ran a hundred yards or so till they reached a clump of swamp willows, and took shelter behind them. Indeed, Foy did more, for he climbed the trunk of one of the willows high enough to see over the reeds to the ship *Swallow* and the lake beyond. By this

time the Spaniards were alongside the *Swallow*, for he could hear their captain hailing him who leant over the taffrail, and commanding all on board to surrender under pain of being put to death. But from the man in the stern came no answer, which was scarcely strange, seeing that it was the dead pilot, Hans, to whom they talked in the misty dawn, whose body Martin had lashed thus to deceive them. So they fired at the pilot, who took no notice, and then began to clamber on board the ship. Presently all the men were out of the first boat—that with the sail set on it—except two, the steersman and the captain, whom, from his dress and demeanour, Foy took to be the one-eyed Spaniard, Ramiro, although of this he was too far off to make sure. It was certain, however, that this man did not mean to board the *Swallow*, for of a sudden he put his boat about, and the wind catching the sail soon drew him clear of her.

"That fellow is cunning," said Foy to Martin and Martha below, "and I was a fool to light the tarred canvas, for he has seen the smoke drawing up the hatchway."

"And having had enough fire for one night, thinks that he will leave his mates to quench it," added Martin.

"The second boat is coming alongside," went on Foy, "and surely the mine should spring."

"Scarcely time yet," answered Martin, "the matches were set for six minutes."

Then followed a silence in which the three of them watched and listened with beating hearts. In it they heard a voice call out that the steersman was dead, and the answering voice of the officer in the boat, whom Foy had been right in supposing to be Ramiro, warning them to beware of treachery. Now suddenly arose a shout of "A mine! a mine!" for they had found one of the lighted fuses.

"They are running for their boat," said Foy, "and the captain is sailing farther off. Heavens! how they scream."

As the words passed his lips a tongue of flame shot to

the very skies. The island seemed to rock, a fierce rush of air struck Foy and shook him from the tree. Then came a dreadful, thunderous sound, and lo! the sky was darkened with fragments of wreck, limbs of men, a grey cloud of salt and torn shreds of sail and cargo, which fell here, there, and everywhere about and beyond them.

In five seconds it was over, and the three of them, shaken but unhurt, were clinging to each other on the ground. Then as the dark pall of smoke drifted southward Foy scrambled up his tree again. But now there was little to be seen, for the *Swallow* had vanished utterly, and for many yards round where she lay the wreckage-strewn water was black as ink with the stirred mud. The Spaniards had gone also, nothing of them was left, save the two men and the boat which rode unhurt at a distance. Foy stared at them. The steersman was seated and wringing his hands, while the captain, on whose armour the rays of the rising sun now shone brightly, held to the mast like one stunned, and gazed at the place where, a minute before, had been a ship and a troop of living men. Presently he seemed to recover himself, for he issued an order, whereon the boat's head went about, and she began to glide away.

"Now we had best try to catch him," said Martha, who, by standing up, could see this also.

"Nay, let him be," answered Foy, "we have sent enough men to their account," and he shuddered.

"As you will, master," grumbled Martin, "but I tell you it is not wise. That man is too clever to be allowed to live, else he would have accompanied the others on board and perished with them."

"Oh! I am sick," replied Foy. "The wind from that powder has shaken me. Settle it as you will with Mother Martha and leave me in peace."

So Martin turned to speak with Martha, but she was not there. Chuckling to herself in the madness of her

hate and the glory of this great revenge, she had slipped away, knife in hand, to discover whether perchance any of the powder-blasted Spaniards still lived. Fortunately for them they did not, the shock had killed them all, even those who at the first alarm had thrown themselves into the water. At length Martin found her clapping her hands and crooning above a dead body, so shattered that no one could tell to what manner of man it had belonged, and led her away.

But although she was keen enough for the chase, by now it was too late, for, travelling before the strong wind, Ramiro and his boat had vanished.

CHAPTER XV

SEÑOR RAMIRO

If Foy van Goorl, by some magic, could have seen what was passing in the mind of that fugitive in the boat as he sailed swiftly away from the scene of death and ruin, bitterly indeed would he have cursed the folly and inexperience which led him to disregard the advice of Red Martin.

Let us look at this man as he goes gnawing his hand in rage and disappointment. There is something familiar about his face and bearing, still gallant enough in a fashion, yet the most observant would find it difficult to recognise in the Señor Ramiro the handsome and courtly Count Juan de Montalvo of over twenty years before. A long spell of the galleys changes the hardiest man, and by ill luck Montalvo, or Ramiro, to call him by his new name, had been forced to serve nearly his full time. He would have escaped earlier indeed, had he not been foolish enough to join in a mutiny, which was discovered and suppressed. It was in the course of this savage struggle for freedom that he lost his eye, knocked out with a belaying pin by an officer whom he had just stabbed. The innocent officer died and the rascal Ramiro recovered, but without his good looks.

To a person of gentle birth, however great a scoundrel he might be, the galleys, which represented penal servitude in the sixteenth century, were a very rough school. Indeed for the most part the man who went into them blameless became bad, and the man who went into them bad became worse, for, as the proverb says, those who have

dwelt in hell always smell of brimstone. Who can imagine the awfulness of it—the chains, the arduous and continual labour, the whip of the quarter-masters, the company of thieves and outcast ruffians, all dreadful in its squalid sameness?

Well, his strength and constitution, coupled with a sort of grim philosophy, brought him through, and at length Ramiro found himself a free man, middle-aged indeed, but intelligent and still strong, the world once more before him. Yet what a world! His wife, believing him dead, or perhaps wishing to believe it, had remarried and gone with her husband to New Spain, taking his children with her, and his friends, such of them as lived, turned their backs upon him. But although he had been an unlucky man, for with him wickedness had not prospered, he still had resource and courage.

The Count Montalvo was a penniless outlaw, a byword and a scorn, and so the Count Montalvo—died, and was buried publicly in the church of his native village. Strangely enough, however, about the same time the Señor Ramiro appeared in another part of Spain, where with success he practised as a notary and man of affairs. Some years went by thus, till at length, having realised a considerable sum of money by the help of an ingenious fraud, of which the details are superfluous, an inspiration took him and he sailed for the Netherlands.

In those dreadful days, in order to further the ends of religious persecution and of legalised theft, informers were rewarded with a portion of the goods of heretics. Ramiro's idea—a great one in its way—was to organise this informing business, and, by interesting a number of confederates who practically were shareholders in the venture, to sweep into his net more fortunes, or shares of fortunes, than a single individual, however industrious, could hope to secure. As he had expected, soon he found plenty of

worthy companions, and the company was floated. For a while, with the help of local agencies and spies, such as Black Meg and the Butcher, with whom, forgetting past injuries, he had secretly renewed his acquaintance, it did very well, the dividends being large and regular. In such times handsome sums were realised, without risk, out of the properties of unfortunates who were brought to the stake, and still more was secured by a splendid system of blackmail extracted from those who wished to avoid execution, and who, when they had been sucked dry, could either be burnt or let go, as might prove most convenient.

Also there were other ways of making money—by an intelligent method of robbery, by contracts to collect fines and taxes and so forth. Thus things went well, and, at length, after many years of suffering and poverty, the Señor Ramiro, that experienced man of affairs, began to grow rich, until, indeed, driven forward by a natural but unwise ambition, a fault inherent to daring minds, he entered upon a dangerous path.

The wealth of Hendrik Brant, the goldsmith, was a matter of common report, and glorious would be the fortune of him who could secure its reversion. This Ramiro wished to win ; indeed, there was no ostensible reason why he should not do so, since Brant was undoubtedly a heretic, and, therefore, legitimate game for any honourable servant of the Church and King. Yet there were lions in the path, two large and formidable lions, or rather a lion and the ghost of a lion, for one was material and the other spiritual. The material lion was that the Government, or in other words, his august kingship Philip, desired the goldsmith's thousands for himself, and was therefore likely to be irritated by an interloper. The spiritual lion was that Brant was connected with Lysbeth van Goorl, once known as Lysbeth de Montalvo, a lady who had brought her reputed husband no luck. Often and often during

dreary hours of reflection beneath tropic suns, for which the profession of galley-slave gave great leisure, the Señor Ramiro remembered that very energetic curse which his new affianced wife had bestowed upon him, a curse in which she prayed that through her he might live in heavy labour, that through her and hers he might be haunted by fears and misfortunes, and at the last die in misery. Looking back upon the past it would certainly seem that there had been virtue in this curse, for already through Lysbeth and his dealings with her, he had suffered the last degradation and the toil, which could not be called light, of nearly fourteen years of daily occupation in the galleys.

Well, he was clear of them, and thenceforward, the curse having exhausted itself for the time being, he had prospered—at any rate to a moderate extent. But if once more he began to interfere with Lysbeth van Goorl and her relatives, might it not re-assert its power? That was one question. Was it worth while to take this risk on the chance of securing Brant's fortune? That was another. Brant, it was true, was only a cousin of Lysbeth's husband, but when once you meddled with a member of the family, it was impossible to know how soon other members would become mixed up in the affair.

The end may be guessed. The treasure was at hand and enormous, whereas the wrath of a Heavenly or an earthly king was problematical and far away. So greed, outstripping caution and superstitious fear, won the race, and Ramiro threw himself into the adventure with a resource and energy which in their way were splendid.

Now, as always, he was a man who hated violence for its own sake. It was no wish of his that the worthy Heer Brant should be unnecessarily burnt or tortured. Therefore through his intermediaries, as Brant had narrated in his letter, he approached him with a proposal which, under the circumstances, was liberal enough—that Brant should

hand over two-thirds of his fortune to him and his confederates, on condition that he was assisted to escape with the remaining third. To his disgust, however, this obstinate Dutchman refused to buy his safety at the price of a single stiver. Indeed, he answered with rude energy that now as always he was in the hands of God, and if it pleased God that his life should be sacrificed and his great wealth divided amongst thieves, well, it must be so, but he, at least, would be no party to the arrangement.

The details of the plots and counter-plots, the attack of the Ramiro company, the defences of Brant, the internecine struggles between the members of the company and the agents of the Government, if set out at length, would fill a considerable book. Of these we already know something, and the rest may be divined.

In the whole course of the affair Ramiro had made but one mistake, and that sprang from what he was wont to consider the weakness of his nature. Needless to say, it was that he had winked at the escape of Brant's daughter, Elsa. It may have been superstition that prompted him, or it may have been pity, or perhaps it was a certain oath of mercy which he had taken in an hour of need; at any rate, he was content that the girl should not share the doom which overshadowed her father. He did not think it at all likely that she would take with her any documents of importance, and the treasure, of course, she could not take; still, to provide against accidents he arranged for her to be searched upon the road.

As we know this search was a failure, and when on the morrow Black Meg arrived to make report and to warn him that Dirk van Goorl's son and his great serving-man, whose strength was known throughout the Netherlands, were on their road to The Hague, he was sure that after all the girl had carried with her some paper or message.

By this time the whereabouts of Brant's treasure had been

practically solved. It was believed to lie in the string of vessels, although it was not known that one of these was laden with powder as well as gold. The plan of the Government agents was to search the vessels as they passed out to sea and seize the treasure as contraband, which would save much legal trouble, since under the law or the edicts wealth might not be shipped abroad by heretics. The plan of Ramiro and his friends was to facilitate the escape of the treasure to the open sea, where they proposed to swoop down upon it and convey it to more peaceful shores.

When Foy and his party started down the canal in the boat Ramiro knew that his opportunity had come, and at once unmoored the big ship and followed. The attempted stabbing of Foy was not done by his orders, as he wished the party to go unmolested and to be kept in sight. That was a piece of private malice on the part of Black Meg, for it was she who was dressed as a man. On various occasions in Leyden Foy had made remarks upon Meg's character which she resented, and about her personal appearance, which she resented much more, and this was an attempt to pay off old scores that in the issue cost her a finger, a good knife, and a gold ring which had associations connected with her youth.

At first everything had gone well. By one of the most daring and masterly manœuvres that Ramiro had ever seen in his long and varied experience upon the seas, the little *Swallow*, with her crew of three men, had run the gauntlet of the fort which was warned and waiting for her; had sunk and sailed through the big Government boat and her crew of lubberly soldiers, many of whom, he was glad to reflect, were drowned; had crushed the officer, against whom he had a personal grudge, like an egg-shell, and won through to the open sea. There he thought he was sure of her, for he took it for granted that she would run for the Norfolk coast, and knew that in the gale of wind which

was blowing his larger and well-manned vessel could pull her down. But then the ill-luck—that ancient ill-luck which always dogged him when he began to interfere with the affairs of Lysbeth and her relatives—declared itself.

Instead of attempting to cross the North Sea the little *Swallow* hugged the coast, where, for various nautical reasons connected with the wind, the water, and the build of their respective ships, she had the legs of him. Next he lost her in the gut, and after that we know what happened. There was no disguising it; it was a most dreadful fiasco. To have one's vessel boarded, the expensive vessel in which so large a proportion of the gains of his honourable company had been invested, not only boarded, but fired, and the watchman stabbed by a single naked devil of unknown sex or character was bad enough. And then the end of it!

To have found the gold-laden ship, to have been gulled into attacking her, and—and—oh! he could scarcely bear to think of it! There was but one consolation. Although too late to save the others, even through the mist he had seen that wisp of smoke rising from the hold; yes, he, the experienced, had smelt a rat, and, warned by some half-divine intuition, had kept his distance with the result that he was still alive.

But the others! Those gallant comrades in adventure, where were they? Well, to be frank, he did not greatly care. There was another question of more moment. Where was the treasure? Now that his brain had cleared after the shock and turmoil it was evident to him that Foy van Goorl, Red Martin, and the white devil who had boarded his ship, would not have destroyed so much wealth if they could help it, and still less would they have destroyed themselves. Therefore, to pursue the matter to a logical conclusion, it seemed probable that they had spent the night in sinking or burying the money, and preparing the pretty trap into which he had walked. So the secret was

in their hands, and as they were still alive very possibly means could be found to induce them to reveal its hiding-place. There was still hope; indeed, now that he came to weigh things, they were not so bad.

To begin with, almost all the shareholders in the affair had perished by the stern decree of Providence, and he was the natural heir of their interests. In other words, the treasure, if it could be recovered, was henceforth his property. Further, when they came to hear the story, the Government would set down Brant's fortune as hopelessly lost, so that the galling competition from which he had suffered so much was at an end.

Under these circumstances what was to be done? Very soon, as he sailed away over the lake in the sweet air of the morning, the Señor Ramiro found an answer to the question.

The treasure had left The Hague, he must leave The Hague. The secret of its disposal was at Leyden, henceforth he must live at Leyden. Why not? He knew Leyden well. It was a pleasant place, but, of course, he might be recognised there; though, after so long, this was scarcely probable, for was not the Count de Montalvo notoriously dead and buried? Time and accident had changed him; moreover, he could bring art to the assistance of nature. In Leyden, too, he had confederates—Black Meg to wit, for one; also he had funds, for was he not the treasurer of the company that this very morning had achieved so remarkable and unsought-for an ascension?

There was only one thing against the scheme. In Leyden lived Lysbeth van Goorl and her husband, and with them a certain young man whose parentage he could guess. More, her son Foy knew the hiding-place of Brant's hoard, and from him or his servant Martin that secret must be won. So once again he was destined to match himself

against Lysbeth—the wronged, the dreaded, the victorious Lysbeth, whose voice of denunciation still rang in his ear, whose eyes of fire still scorched his soul, the woman whom he feared above everything on earth. He fought her once for money, and, although he won the money, it had done him little good, for in the end she worsted him. Now, if he went to Leyden, he must fight her again for money, and what would be the issue of that war? Was it worth while to take the risk? Would not history repeat itself? If he hurt her, would she not crush him? But the treasure, that mighty treasure, which could give him so much, and, above all, could restore to him the rank and station he had forfeited, and which he coveted more than anything in life. For, low as he had fallen, Montalvo could not forget that he had been born a gentleman.

He would take his chance; he would go to Leyden. Had he weighed the matter in the gloom of night, or even in a dull and stormy hour, perhaps—nay probably—he would have decided otherwise. But this morning the sun shone brightly, the wind made a merry music in the reeds; on the rippling surface of the lake the marsh-birds sang, and from the shore came a cheerful lowing of kine. In such surroundings his fears and superstitions vanished. He was master of himself, and he knew that all depended upon himself, the rest was dream and nonsense. Behind him lay the buried gold; before him rose the towers of Leyden, where he could find its key. A God! that haunting legend of a God of vengeance, in which priests and others affected to believe? Now that he came to think of it, what rubbish was here, for as any agent of the Inquisition knew well, the vengeance always fell upon those who trusted in this same God; a hundred torture dens, a thousand smoking fires bore witness to the fact. And if there was a God, why, recognising his personal merits, only this morning He had selected him out of many to live on and

be the inheritor of the wealth of Hendrik Brant. Yes, he would go to Leyden and fight the battle out.

At the entry of the gut the Señor Ramiro landed from his boat. At first he had thought of killing his companion, so that he might remain the sole survivor of the catastrophe, but on reflection he abandoned this idea, as the man was a faithful creature of his own who might be useful. So he bade him return to The Hague to tell the story of the destruction of the ship *Swallow* with the treasure, her attackers and her crew, whoever they might have been. He was to add, moreover, that so far as he knew the Captain Ramiro had perished also, as he, the steersman, was left alone in charge of the boat when the vessel blew up. Then he was to come to Leyden, bringing with him certain goods and papers belonging to him, Ramiro.

This plan seemed to have advantages. No one would continue to hunt for the treasure. No one except himself and perhaps Black Meg would know that Foy van Goorl and Martin had been on board the *Swallow* and escaped; indeed as yet he was not quite sure of it himself. For the rest he could either lie hidden, or if it proved desirable, announce that he still lived. Even if his messenger should prove faithless and tell the truth, it would not greatly matter, seeing that he knew nothing which could be of service to anybody.

And so the steersman sailed away, while Ramiro, filled with memories, reflections, and hopes, walked quietly through the Morsch Poort into the good city of Leyden.

That evening, but not until dark had fallen, two other travellers entered Leyden, namely, Foy and Martin. Passing unobserved through the quiet streets, they reached the side door of the house in the Bree Straat. It was opened by a serving-woman, who told Foy that his mother was in

Adrian's room, also that Adrian was very much better. So thither, followed more slowly by Martin, went Foy, running upstairs three steps at a time, for had he not a great story to tell !

The interior of the room as he entered it made an attractive picture which even in his hurry caught Foy's eye and fixed itself so firmly upon his mind that he never forgot its details. To begin with, the place was beautifully furnished, for his brother had a really good taste in tapestry, pictures, and other such adornments. Adrian himself lay upon a richly carved oak bed, pale from loss of blood, but otherwise little the worse. Seated by the side of the bed, looking wonderfully sweet in the lamplight, which cast shadows from the curling hair about her brows on to the delicate face beneath, was Elsa Brant. She had been reading to Adrian from a book of Spanish chivalry such as his romantic soul loved, and he, resting on his elbow in the snowy bed, was contemplating her beauty with his languishing black eyes. Yet, although he only saw her for a moment before she heard his entry and looked up, it was obvious to Foy that Elsa remained quite unconscious of the handsome Adrian's admiration, indeed, that her mind wandered far away from the magnificent adventures and highly coloured love scenes of which she was reading in her sweet, low voice. Nor was he mistaken, for, in fact, the poor child was thinking of her father.

At the further end of the room, talking together earnestly in the deep and curtained window-place, stood his mother and his father. Clearly they were as much preoccupied as the younger couple, and it was not difficult for Foy to guess that fears for his own safety upon his perilous errand were what concerned them most, and behind them other unnumbered fears. For the dwellers in the Netherlands of those days must walk from year to year through a valley of shadows so grim that our imagination can scarcely picture them.

"Sixty hours and he is not back," Lysbeth was saying.

"Martin said we were not to trouble ourselves before they had been gone for a hundred," answered Dirk consolingly.

Just then Foy, surveying them from the shadowed doorway, stepped forward, saying in his jovial voice:

"Sixty hours to the very minute."

Lysbeth uttered a little scream of joy and ran forward. Elsa let the book fall on to the floor and rose to do the same, then remembered and stood still, while Dirk remained where he was till the women had done their greetings, betraying his delight only by a quick rubbing of his hands. Adrian alone did not look particularly pleased, not, however, because he retained any special grudge against his brother for his share in the fracas of a few nights before, since, when once his furious gusts of temper had passed, he was no malevolently minded man. Indeed he was glad that Foy had come back safe from his dangerous adventure, only he wished that he would not blunder into the bedroom and interrupt his delightful occupation of listening, while the beautiful Elsa read him romance and poetry.

Since Foy was gone upon his mission, Adrian had been treated with the consideration which he felt to be his due. Even his stepfather had taken an opportunity to mumble some words of regret for what had happened, and to express a hope that nothing more would be said about the matter, while his mother was sympathetic and Elsa most charming and attentive. Now, as he knew well, all this would be changed. Foy, the exuberant, unrefined, plain-spoken, nerve-shaking Foy, would become the centre of attraction, and overwhelm them with long stories of very dull exploits, while Martin, that brutal bull of a man who was only fit to draw a cart, would stand behind and play the part of chorus, saying "Ja" and "Neen" at proper intervals. Well, he supposed that he must put up with it, but oh! what a weariness it was.



"SIXTY HOURS TO THE VERY MINUTE"

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Another minute, and Foy was wringing him by the hand, saying in his loud voice, "How are you, old fellow? You look as well as possible, what are you lying in this bed for and being fed with pap by the women?"

"For the love of Heaven, Foy," interrupted Adrian, "stop crushing my fingers and shaking me as though I were a rat. You mean it kindly, I know, but—" and Adrian dropped back upon the pillow, coughed and looked hectic and interesting.

Then both the women fell upon Foy, upbraiding him for his roughness, begging him to remember that if he were not careful he might kill his brother, whose arteries were understood to be in a most precarious condition, till the poor man covered his ears with his hands and waited till he saw their lips stop moving.

"I apologise," he said. "I won't touch him, I won't speak loud near him. Adrian, do you hear?"

"Who could help it?" moaned the prostrate Adrian.

"Cousin Foy," interrupted Elsa, clasping her hands and looking up into his face with her big brown eyes, "forgive me, but I can wait no longer. Tell me, did you see or hear anything of my father yonder at The Hague?"

"Yes, cousin, I saw him," answered Foy soberly.

"And how was he—oh! and all the rest of them?"

"He was well."

"And free and in no danger?"

"And free, but I cannot say in no danger. We are all of us in danger nowadays, cousin," replied Foy in the same quiet voice.

"Oh! thank God for that," said Elsa.

"Little enough to thank God for," muttered Martin, who had entered the room and was standing behind Foy looking like a giant at a show. Elsa had turned her face away, so Foy struck backwards with all his force, hitting Martin in the pit of the stomach with the point of his

elbow. Martin doubled himself up, recoiled a step and took the hint.

"Well, son, what news?" said Dirk, speaking for the first time.

"News!" answered Foy, escaping joyfully from this treacherous ground. "Oh! lots of it. Look here," and plunging his hands into his pockets he produced first the half of the broken dagger and secondly a long skinny finger of unwholesome hue with a gold ring on it.

"Bah!" said Adrian. "Take that horrid thing away."

"Oh! I beg your pardon," answered Foy, shuffling the finger back into his pocket, "you don't mind the dagger, do you? No? Well, then, mother, that mail shirt of yours is the best that was ever made; this knife broke on it like a carrot, though, by the way, it's uncommonly sticky wear when you haven't changed it for three days, and I shall be glad enough to get it off."

"Evidently Foy has a story to tell," said Adrian wearily, "and the sooner he rids his mind of it the sooner he will be able to wash. I suggest, Foy, that you should begin at the beginning."

So Foy began at the beginning, and his tale proved sufficiently moving to interest even the soul-worn Adrian. Some portions of it he softened down, and some of it he suppressed for the sake of Elsa—not very successfully, indeed, for Foy was no diplomatist, and her quick imagination filled the gaps. Another part—that which concerned her future and his own—of necessity he omitted altogether. He told them very briefly, however, of the flight from The Hague, of the sinking of the Government boat, of the run through the gale to the Haarlem Mere with the dead pilot on board and the Spanish ship behind, and of the secret midnight burying of the treasure.

"Where did you bury it?" asked Adrian.

"I have not the slightest idea," said Foy. "I believe

there are about three hundred islets in that part of the Mere, and all I know is that we dug a hole in one of them and stuck it in. However," he went on in a burst of confidence, "we made a map of the place, that is—" Here he broke off with a howl of pain, for an accident had happened.

While this narrative was proceeding, Martin, who was standing by him saying "Ja" and "Neen" at intervals, as Adrian foresaw he would, had unbuckled the great sword Silence, and in an abstracted manner was amusing himself by throwing it towards the ceiling hilt downwards, and as it fell catching it in his hand. Now, most unaccountably, he looked the other way and missed his catch, with the result that the handle of the heavy weapon fell exactly upon Foy's left foot and then clattered to the ground.

"You awkward beast!" roared Foy, "you have crushed my toes," and he hopped towards a chair upon one leg.

"Your pardon, master," said Martin. "I know it was careless; my mother always told me that I was careless, but so was my father before me."

Adrian, overcome by the fearful crash, closed his eyes and sighed.

"Look," said Lysbeth in a fury, "he is fainting; I knew that would be the end of all your noise. If you are not careful we shall have him breaking another vessel. Go out of the room, all of you. You can finish telling the story downstairs," and she drove them before her as a farmer's wife drives fowls.

"Martin," said Foy on the stairs, where they found themselves together for a minute, for at the first signs of the storm Dirk had preceded them, "why did you drop that accursed great sword of yours upon my foot?"

"Master," countered Martin imperturbably, "why did you hit me in the pit of the stomach with your elbow?"

"To keep your tongue quiet."

"And what is the name of my sword?"

"Silence."

"Well, then, I dropped the sword 'Silence' for the same reason. I hope it hasn't hurt you much, but if it did I can't help it."

Foy wheeled round. "What do you mean, Martin?"

"I mean," answered the great man with energy, "that you have no right to tell what became of that paper which Mother Martha gave us."

"Why not? I have faith in my brother."

"Very likely, master, but that isn't the point. We carry a great secret, and this secret is a trust, a dangerous trust; it would be wrong to lay its burden upon the shoulders of other folk. What people don't know they can't tell, master."

Foy still stared at him, half in question, half in anger, but Martin made no further reply in words. Only he went through certain curious motions, motions as of a man winding slowly and laboriously at something like a pump wheel. Foy's lips turned pale.

"The rack?" he whispered. Martin nodded, and answered beneath his breath,

"They may all of them be on it yet. You let the man in the boat escape, and that man was the Spanish spy, Ramiro; I am sure of it. If they don't know they can't tell, and though we know we shan't tell; we shall die first, master."

Now Foy trembled and leaned against the wall. "What would betray us?" he asked.

"Who knows, master? A woman's torment, a man's—" and he put a strange meaning into his voice, "a man's—jealousy, or pride, or vengeance. Oh! bridle your tongue and trust no one, no, not your father or mother, or sweetheart, or—" and again that strange meaning came into Martin's voice, "or brother."

"Or you?" queried Foy looking up.

"I am not sure. Yes, I think you may trust me, though there is no knowing how the rack might change a man's mind."

"If all this be so," said Foy, with a flash of sudden passion, "I have said too much already."

"A great deal too much, master. If I could have managed it I should have dropped the sword Silence on your toe long before. But I couldn't, for the Heer Adrian was watching me, and I had to wait till he closed his eyes, which he did to hear the better without seeming to listen."

"You are unjust to Adrian, Martin, as you always have been, and I am angry with you. Say, what is to be done now?"

"Now, master," replied Martin cheerfully, "you must forget the teaching of the Pastor Arentz, and tell a lie. You must take up your tale where you left it off, and say that we made a map of the hiding-place, but that—I—being a fool—managed to drop it while we were lighting the fuses, so that it was blown away with the ship. I will tell the same story."

"Am I to say this to my father and mother?"

"Certainly, and they will quite understand why you say it. My mistress was getting uneasy already, and that was why she drove us from the room. You will tell them that the treasure is buried but that the secret of its hiding-place was lost."

"Even so, Martin, it is not lost; Mother Martha knows it, and they all will guess that she does know it."

"Why, master, as it happened you were in such a hurry to get on with your story that I think you forgot to mention that she was present at the burying of the barrels. Her name was coming when I dropped the sword upon your foot."

"But she boarded and fired the Spanish ship—so the

man Ramiro and his companion would probably have seen her."

"I doubt, master, that the only person who saw her was he whose gizzard she split, and he will tell no tales. Probably they think it was you or I who did that deed. But if she was seen, or if they know that she has the secret, then let them get it from Mother Martha. Oh! mares can gallop and ducks can dive and snakes can hide in the grass. When they can catch the wind and make it give up its secrets, when they can charm from sword Silence the tale of the blood which it has drunk throughout the generations, when they can call back the dead saints from heaven and stretch them anew within the torture-pit, then and not before, they will win knowledge of the hoard's hiding-place from the lips of the witch of Haarlem Mere. Oh! master, fear not for her, the grave is not so safe."

"Why did you not caution me before, Martin?"

"Because, master," answered Martin stolidly, "I did not think that you would be such a fool. But I forgot that you are young—yes, I forgot that you are young and good, too good for the days we live in. It is my fault. On my head be it."

CHAPTER XVI

THE MASTER

In the sitting-room, speaking more slowly and with greater caution, Foy continued the story of their adventures. When he came to the tale of how the ship *Swallow* was blown up with all the Spanish boarders, Elsa clasped her hands, saying, "Horrible! Horrible! Think of the poor creatures hurled thus into eternity."

"And think of the business they were on," broke in Dirk grimly, adding, "May God forgive me who cannot feel grieved to hear of the death of Spanish cut-throats. It was well managed, Foy, excellently well managed. But go on."

"I think that is about all," said Foy shortly, "except that two of the Spaniards got away in a boat, one of whom is believed to be the head spy and captain, Ramiro."

"But, son, up in Adrian's chamber just now you said something about having made a map of the hiding-place of the gold. Where is it, for it should be put in safety?"

"Yes, I know I did," answered Foy, "but didn't I tell you?" he went on awkwardly. "Martin managed to drop the thing in the cabin of the *Swallow* while we were lighting the fuses, so it was blown up with the ship, and there is now no record of where the stuff was buried."

"Come, come, son," said Dirk. "Martha, who knows every island on the great lake, must remember the spot."

"Oh! no, she doesn't," answered Foy. "The truth is that she didn't come with us when we buried the barrels. She stopped to watch the Spanish ship, and just told us to

land on the first island we came to and dig a hole, which we did, making a map of the place before we left, the same that Martin dropped."

All this clumsy falsehood Foy uttered with a wooden face and in a voice which would not have convinced a three-year-old infant, priding himself the while upon his extraordinary cleverness.

"Martin," asked Dirk, suspiciously, "is this true?"

"Absolutely true, master," replied Martin; "it is wonderful how well he remembers."

"Son," said Dirk, turning white with suppressed anger, "you have always been a good lad, and now you have shown yourself a brave one, but I pray God that I may not be forced to add that you are false-tongued. Do you not see that this looks black? The treasure which you have hidden is the greatest in all the Netherlands. Will not folk say, it is not wonderful that you should have forgotten its secret until—it suits you to remember?"

Foy took a step forward, his face crimson with indignation, but the heavy hand of Martin fell upon his shoulder and dragged him back as though he were but a little child.

"I think, Master Foy," he said, fixing his eyes upon Lysbeth, "that your lady mother wishes to say something."

"You are right, Martin; I do. Do you not think, husband, that in these days of ours a man might have other reasons for hiding the truth than a desire to enrich himself by theft?"

"What do you mean, wife?" asked Dirk. "Foy here says that he has buried this great hoard with Martin, but that he and Martin do not know where they buried it, and have lost the map they made. Whatever may be the exact wording of the will, that hoard belongs to my cousin here, subject to certain trusts which have not yet arisen, and may never arise, and I am her guardian while Hendrik Brant lives and his executor when he dies. Therefore,

legally, it belongs to me also. By what right, then, do my son and my servant hide the truth from me, if, indeed, they are hiding the truth? Say what you have to say straight out, for I am a plain man and cannot read riddles."

"Then I will say it, husband, though it is but my guess, for I have had no words with Foy or Martin, and if I am wrong they can correct me. I know their faces, and I think with you that they are not speaking the truth. I think that they do not wish us to know it—not that they may keep the secret of this treasure for themselves, but because such a secret might well bring those who know of it to the torment and the stake. Is it not so, my son?"

"Mother," answered Foy, almost in a whisper, "it is so. The paper is not lost, but do not seek to learn its hiding-place, for there are wolves who would tear your bodies limb from limb to get the knowledge out of you; yes, even Elsa's, even Elsa's. If the trial must come, let it fall on me and Martin, who are fitter to bear it. Oh! father, surely you know that, whatever we may be, neither of us are thieves."

Dirk advanced to his son, and kissed him on the forehead.

"My son," he said, "pardon me, and you, Red Martin, pardon me also. I spoke in my haste. I spoke as a fool, who, at my age, should have known better. But, oh! I tell you that I wish that this cursed treasure, these cases of priceless gems and these kegs of hoarded gold, had been shivered to the winds of heaven with the timbers of the ship *Swallow*. For, mark you, Ramiro has escaped, and with him another man, and they will know well that having the night to hide it, you did not destroy those jewels with the ship. They will track you down, these Spanish sleuthhounds, filled with the lust of blood and gold, and it will be well if the lives of every one of us do not pay the

price of the secret of the burying-place of the wealth of Hendrik Brant."

He ceased, pale and trembling, and a silence fell upon the room and all in it, a sad and heavy silence, for in his voice they caught the note of prophecy. Martin broke it.

"It may be so, master," he said; "but, your pardon, you should have thought of that before you undertook this duty. There was no call upon you to send the Heer Foy and myself to The Hague to bring away this trash, but you did it as would any other honest man. Well, now it is done and we must take our chance, but I say this—if you are wise, my masters, yes, and you ladies also, before you leave this room you will swear upon the Bible, every one of you, never to whisper the word treasure, never to think of it except to believe that it is gone—lost beneath the waters of the Haarlemer Meer. Never to whisper it, no, mistress, not even to the Heer Adrian, your son who lies sick abed upstairs."

"You have learnt wisdom somewhere of late years, Martin, since you stopped drinking and fighting," said Dirk drily, "and for my part before God I swear it."

"And so do I." "And I." "And I." "And I," echoed the others, Martin, who spoke last, adding, "Yes, I swear that I will never speak of it; no, *not even to my young master Adrian, who lies sick abed upstairs.*"

Adrian made a good, though not a very quick recovery. He had lost a great deal of blood, but the vessel closed without further complications, so that it remained only to renew his strength by rest and ample food. For ten days or so after the return of Foy and Martin, he was kept in bed and nursed by the women of the house. Elsa's share in this treatment was to read to him from the Spanish romances which he admired. Very soon, however, he found that he admired Elsa herself even more than the

romances, and would ask her to shut the book that he might talk to her. So long as his conversation was about himself, his dreams, plans and ambitions, she fell into it readily enough; but when he began to turn it upon *herself*, and to lard it with compliment and amorous innuendo, then she demurred, and fled to the romances for refuge.

Handsome as he might be, Adrian had no attractions for Elsa. About him there was something too exaggerated for her taste; moreover he was Spanish, Spanish in his beauty, Spanish in the cast of his mind, and all Spaniards were hateful to her. Deep down in her heart also lay a second reason for this repugnance; the man reminded her of another man who for months had been a nightmare to her soul, the Hague spy, Ramiro. This Ramiro she had observed closely. Though she had not seen him very often his terrible reputation was familiar to her. She knew also, for her father had told her as much, that it was he who was drawing the nets about him at The Hague, and who plotted day and night to rob him of his wealth.

At first sight there was no great resemblance between the pair. How could there be indeed between a man on the wrong side of middle age, one-eyed, grizzled, battered, and bearing about with him an atmosphere of iniquity, and a young gentleman, handsome, distinguished, and wayward, but assuredly no criminal? Yet the likeness existed. She had seen it first when Adrian was pointing out to her how, were he a general, he would dispose his forces for the capture of Leyden, and from that moment her nature rose in arms against him. Also it came out in other ways, in little tricks of voice and pomposities of manner which Elsa caught at unexpected moments, perhaps, as she told herself, because she had trained her mind to seek these similarities. Yet all the while she knew that the fancy was ridiculous, for what could these two men have in common with each other?

In those days, however, Elsa did not think much of Adrian, or of anybody except her beloved father, whose only child she was, and whom she adored with all the passion of her heart. She knew the terrible danger in which he stood, and guessed that she had been sent away that she should not share his perils. Now she had but one desire and one prayer—that he might escape in safety, and that she might return to him again. Once only a message came from him, sent through a woman whom she had never seen, the wife of a fisherman, who delivered it by word of mouth. This was the message:

"Give my love and blessing to my daughter Elsa, and tell her that so far I am unharmed. To Foy van Goorl say, I have heard the news. Well done, thou good and faithful servant! Let him remember what I told him, and be sure that he will not strive in vain, and that he shall not lack for his reward here or hereafter."

That was all. Tidings reached them also that the destruction of so many men by the blowing up of the *Swallow*, and by her sinking of the Government boat as she escaped, had caused much excitement and fury among the Spaniards. But, as those who had been blown up were free-lances, and as the boat was sunk while the *Swallow* was flying from them, nothing had been done in the matter. Indeed, nothing could be done, for it was not known who manned the *Swallow*, and, as Ramiro had foreseen, her crew were supposed to have been destroyed with her in the Haarlemer Meer.

Then, after a while, came other news that filled Elsa's heart with a wild hope, for it was reported that Hendrik Brant had disappeared, and was believed to have escaped from The Hague. Nothing more was heard of him, however, which is scarcely strange, for the doomed man had gone down the path of rich heretics into the silent vaults

of the Inquisition. The net had closed at last, and through the net fell the sword.

But if Elsa thought seldom of Adrian, except in gusts of spasmodic dislike, Adrian thought of Elsa, and little besides. So earnestly did he lash his romantic temperament, and so deeply did her beauty and charm appeal to him, that very soon he was truly in love with her. Nor did the fact that, as he believed, she was, potentially, the greatest heiress in the Netherlands, cool Adrian's amorous devotion. What could suit him better in his condition, than to marry this rich and lovely lady?

So Adrian made up his mind that he would marry her, for, in his vanity, it never occurred to him that she might object. Indeed, the only thought that gave him trouble was the difficulty of reducing her wealth into possession. Foy and Martin had buried it somewhere in the Haarlemer Meer. But they said, for this he had ascertained by repeated inquiries, although the information was given grudgingly enough, that the map of the hiding-place had been destroyed in the explosion on the *Swallow*. Adrian did not believe this story for a moment. He was convinced that they were keeping the truth from him, and as the prospective master of that treasure he resented this reticence bitterly. Still, it had to be overcome, and so soon as he was engaged to Elsa he intended to speak very clearly upon this point. Meanwhile, the first thing was to find a suitable opportunity to make his declaration in due form, which done he would be prepared to deal with Foy and Martin.

Towards evening it was Elsa's custom to walk abroad. As at that hour Foy left the foundry, naturally he accompanied her in these walks, Martin following at a little distance in case he should be wanted. Soon those excursions became delightful to both of them. To Elsa, especially, it was pleasant to escape from the hot house into the cool evening air, and still more pleasant to exchange the laboured

tendernesses and highly coloured compliments of Adrian for the cheerful honesty of Foy's conversation.

Foy admired his cousin as much as did his half-brother, but his attitude towards her was very different. He never said sweet things; he never gazed up into her eyes and sighed, although once or twice, perhaps by accident, he did squeeze her hand. His demeanour towards her was that of a friend and relative, and the subject of their talk for the most part was the possibility of her father's deliverance from the dangers which surrounded him, and other matters of the sort.

The time came at last when Adrian was allowed to leave his room, and as it chanced it fell to Elsa's lot to attend him on this first journey downstairs. In a Dutch home of the period and of the class of the Van Goorl's, all the women-folk of whatever degree were expected to take a share in the household work. At present Elsa's share was to do nurse to Adrian, who showed so much temper at every attempt which was made to replace her by any other woman, that, in face of the doctor's instructions, Lysbeth did not dare to cross his whim.

It was with no small delight, therefore, that Elsa hailed the prospect of release, for the young man with his grandiose bearing and amorous sighs wearied her almost beyond endurance. Adrian was not equally pleased; indeed he had feigned symptoms which caused him to remain in bed an extra week, merely in order that he might keep her near him. But now the inevitable hour had come, and Adrian felt that it was incumbent upon him to lift the veil and let Elsa see some of the secret of his soul. He had prepared for the event; indeed the tedium of his confinement had been much relieved by the composition of lofty and heart-stirring addresses, in which he, the noble cavalier, laid his precious self and fortune at the feet of this undistinguished, but rich and attractive maid.



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"IT IS—IT IS—LOVE!"

Yet now when the moment was with him, and when Elsa gave him her hand to lead him from the room, behold! all these beautiful imaginings had vanished, and his knees shook with no fancied weakness. Somehow Elsa did not look as a girl ought to look who was about to be proposed to; she was too cold and dignified, too utterly unconscious of anything unusual. It was disconcerting—but—it must be done.

By a superb effort Adrian recovered himself and opened with one of the fine speeches, not the best by any means, but the only specimen which he could remember.

"Without," he began, "the free air waits to be pressed by my cramped wings, but although my heart bounds wild as that of any haggard hawk, I tell you, fairest Elsa, that in yonder gilded cage," and he pointed to the bed, "I——"

"Heaven above us! Heer Adrian," broke in Elsa in alarm, "are you—are you—getting giddy?"

"She does not understand. Poor child, how should she?" he murmured in a stage aside. Then he started again. "Yes, most adorable, best beloved, I am giddy, giddy with gratitude to those fair hands, giddy with worship of those lovely eyes——"

Now Elsa, unable to contain her merriment any longer, burst out laughing, but seeing that her adorer's face was beginning to look as it did in the dining-room before he broke the blood vessel, she checked herself, and said:

"Oh! Heer Adrian, don't waste all this fine poetry upon me. I am too stupid to understand it."

"Poetry!" he exclaimed, becoming suddenly natural, "it isn't poetry."

"Then what is it?" she asked, and next moment could have bitten her tongue out.

"It is—it is—love!" and he sank upon his knees before her, where, she could not but notice, he looked very handsome in the subdued light of the room, with his

upturned face blanched by sickness, and his southern glowing eyes. "Elsa, I love you and no other, and unless you return that love my heart will break and I shall die."

Now, under ordinary circumstances, Elsa would have been quite competent to deal with the situation, but the fear of over-agitating Adrian complicated it greatly. About the reality of his feelings at the moment, at any rate, it seemed impossible to be mistaken, for the man was shaking like a leaf. Still, she must make an end of these advances.

"Rise, Heer Adrian," she said gently, holding out her hand to help him to his feet.

He obeyed, and glancing at her face, saw that it was very calm and cold as winter ice.

"Listen, Heer Adrian," she said. "You mean this kindly, and doubtless many a maid would be flattered by your words, but I must tell you that I am in no mood for love-making."

"Because of another man?" he queried, and suddenly becoming theatrical again, added, "Speak on, let me hear the worst; I will not quail."

"There is no need to," replied Elsa in the same quiet voice, "because there is no other man. I have never yet thought of marriage, I have no wish that way, and if I had, I should forget it now when from hour to hour I do not know where my dear father may be, or what fate awaits him. He is my only lover, Heer Adrian," and as Elsa spoke her soft brown eyes filled with tears.

"Ah!" said Adrian, "would that I might fly to save him from all dangers, as I rescued you, lady, from the bandits of the wood."

"I would you might," she replied, smiling sadly at the double meaning of the words, "but, hark, your mother is calling us. I know, Heer Adrian," she added gently, "that you will understand and respect my dreadful anx-

iety, and will not trouble me again with poetry and love-talk, for if you do I shall be—angry."

"Lady," he answered, "your wishes are my law, and until these clouds have rolled from the blue heaven of your life I will be as silent as the watching moon. And, by the way," he added rather nervously, "perhaps you will be silent also—about our talk, I mean, as we do not want that buffoon, Foy, thrusting his street-boy fun at us."

Elsa bowed her head. She was inclined to resent the "we" and other things in this speech, but, above all, she did not wish to prolong this foolish and tiresome interview, so, without more words, she took her admirer by the hand and guided him down the stairs.

It was but three days after this ridiculous scene, on a certain afternoon, when Adrian had been out for the second time, that the evil tidings came. Dirk had heard them in the town, and returned home well-nigh weeping. Elsa saw his face and knew at once.

"Oh! is he dead?" she gasped.

He nodded, for he dared not trust himself to speak.

"How? Where?"

"In the Poort prison at The Hague."

"How do you know?"

"I have seen a man who helped to bury him."

She looked up as though to ask for further details, but Dirk turned away muttering, "He is dead, he is dead, let be."

Then she understood, nor did she ever seek to know any more. Whatever he had suffered, at least now he was with the God he worshipped, and with the wife he lost. Only the poor orphan, comforted by Lysbeth, crept from the chamber, and for a week was seen no more. When she appeared again she seemed to be herself in all things, only she never smiled and was very indifferent to what took place about her. Thus she remained for many days.

Although this demeanour on Elsa's part was understood and received with sympathy and more by the rest of the household, Adrian soon began to find it irksome and even ridiculous. So colossal was this young man's vanity that he was unable quite to understand how a girl could be so wrapped up in the memories of a murdered father, that no place was left in her mind for the tendernesses of a present adorer. After all, this father, what was he? A middle-aged and, doubtless, quite uninteresting burgher, who could lay claim to but one distinction, that of great wealth, most of which had been amassed by his ancestors.

Now a rich man alive has points of interest, but a rich man dead is only interesting to his heirs. Also, this Brant was one of these narrow-minded, fanatical, New Religion fellows who were so wearisome to men of intellect and refinement. True, he, Adrian, was himself of that community, for circumstances had driven him into the herd, but oh! he found them a dreary set. Their bald doctrines of individual effort, of personal striving to win a personal redemption, did not appeal to him; moreover, they generally ended at the stake. Now about the pomp and circumstance of the Mother Church there was something attractive. Of course, as a matter of prudence he attended its ceremonials from time to time and found them comfortable and satisfying. Comfortable also were the dogmas of forgiveness to be obtained by an act of penitential confession, and the sense of a great supporting force whose whole weight was at the disposal of the humblest believer.

In short, there was nothing picturesque about the excellent departed Hendrik, nothing that could justify the young woman in wrapping herself up in grief for him to the entire exclusion of a person who *was* picturesque and ready, at the first opportunity, to wrap himself up in her.

After long brooding, assisted by a close study of the

romances of the period, Adrian convinced himself that in all this there was something unnatural, that the girl must be under a species of spell which in her own interest ought to be broken through. But how? That was the question. Try as he would he could do nothing. Therefore, like others in a difficulty, he determined to seek the assistance of an expert, namely, Black Meg, who, among her other occupations, for a certain fee payable in advance, was ready to give advice as a specialist in affairs of the heart.

To Black Meg accordingly he went, disguised, secretly and by night, for he loved mystery, and in truth it was hardly safe that he should visit her by the light of day. Seated in a shadowed chamber he poured out his artless tale to the pythoness, of course concealing all names. He might have spared himself this trouble, as he was an old client of Meg's, a fact that no disguise could keep from her. Before he opened his lips she knew perfectly what was the name of his inamorata and indeed all the circumstances connected with the pair of them.

The wise woman listened in patience, and when he had done, shook her head, saying that the case was too hard for her. She proposed, however, to consult a Master more learned than herself, who, by great good fortune, was at that moment in Leyden, frequenting her house in fact, and begged that Adrian would return at the same hour on the morrow.

Now, as it chanced, oddly enough Black Meg had been commissioned by the said Master to bring about a meeting between himself and this very young man.

Adrian returned accordingly, and was informed that the Master, after consulting the stars and other sources of divination, had become so deeply interested in the affair that, for pure love of the thing and not for any temporal purpose of gain, he was in attendance to advise in person.

Adrian was overjoyed, and prayed that he might be introduced. Presently a noble-looking form entered the room, wrapped in a long cloak. Adrian bowed, and the form, after contemplating him earnestly—very earnestly, if he had known the truth—acknowledged the salute with dignity. Adrian cleared his throat and began to speak, whereon the sage stopped him.

"Explanations are needless, young man," he said, in a measured and melodious voice, "for my studies of the matter have already informed me of more than you can tell. Let me see; your name is Adrian van Goorl—no, called Van Goorl; the lady you desire to win is Elsa Brant, the daughter of Hendrik Brant, a heretic and well-known goldsmith, who was recently executed at The Hague. She is a girl of much beauty, but one unnaturally insensible to the influence of love, and who does not at present recognise your worth. There are, also, unless I am mistaken, other important circumstances connected with the case.

"This lady is a great heiress, but her fortune is at present missing; it is, I have reason to believe, hidden in the Haarlemer Meer. She is surrounded with influences that are inimical to you, all of which, however, can be overcome if you will place yourself unreservedly in my hands, for, young man, I accept no half-confidences, nor do I ask for any fee. When the fortune is recovered and the maiden is your happy wife, then we will talk of payment for services rendered, and not before."

"Wonderful, wonderful!" gasped Adrian; "most learned señor, every word you say is true."

"Yes, friend Adrian, and I have not told you all the truth. For instance—but, no, this is not the time to speak. The question is, do you accept my terms?"

"What terms, señor?"

"The old terms, without which no wonder can be worked—faith, absolute faith."

Adrian hesitated a little. Absolute faith seemed a large present to give a complete stranger at a first interview.

"I read your thought and I respect it," went on the sage, who, to tell truth, was afraid he had ventured a little too far. "There is no hurry; these affairs cannot be concluded in a day."

Adrian admitted that they could not, but intimated that he would be glad of a little practical and immediate assistance. The sage buried his face in his hands and thought.

"The first thing to do," he said presently, "is to induce a favourable disposition of the maiden's mind towards yourself, and this, I think, can best be brought about—though the method is one which I do not often use—by means of a love philtre carefully compounded to suit the circumstances of the case. If you will come here to-morrow at dusk, the lady of this house—a worthy woman, though rough of speech and no true adept—will hand it to you."

"It isn't poisonous?" suggested Adrian doubtfully.

"Fool, do I deal in poisons? It will poison the girl's heart in your favour, that is all."

"And how is it to be administered?" asked Adrian.

"In the water or the wine she drinks, and afterwards you must speak to her again as soon as possible. Now that is settled," he went on airily, "so, young friend, good-bye."

"Are you sure that there is no fee?" hesitated Adrian.

"No, indeed," answered the sage, "at any rate until all is accomplished. Ah!" and he sighed, "did you but know what a delight it is to a weary and world-worn traveller to help forward the bright ambitions of youth, to assist the pure and soaring soul to find the mate destined to it by heaven—ehem!—you wouldn't talk of fees. Besides, I will be frank; from the moment that I entered this room and saw you, I recognised in you a kindred nature, one which under my guidance is capable of great things, of

things greater than I care to tell. Ah! what a vision do I see. You, the husband of the beautiful Elsa and master of her great wealth, and I at your side guiding you with my wisdom and experience—then what might not be achieved? Dreams, doubtless dreams, though how often have my dreams been prophetic! Still, forget them, and at least, young man, we will be friends," and he stretched out his hand.

"With all my heart," answered Adrian, taking those cool, agile-looking fingers. "For years I have sought someone on whom I could rely, someone who would understand me as I feel you do."

"Yes, yes," sighed the sage, "I do indeed understand you."

"To think," he said to himself after the door had closed behind the delighted and flattered Adrian, "to think that I can be the father of such a fool as that. Well, it bears out my theories about cross-breeding, and, after all, in this case a good-looking, gullible fool will be much more useful to me than a young man of sense. Let me see; the price of the office is paid and I shall have my appointment duly sealed as the new Governor of the Gevangenhuis by next week at furthest, so I may as well begin to collect evidence against my worthy successor, Dirk van Goorl, his adventurous son Foy, and that red-headed ruffian, Martin. Once I have them in the Gevangenhuis it will go hard if I can't squeeze the secret of old Brant's money out of one of the three of them. The women wouldn't know, they wouldn't have told the women, besides I don't want to meddle with them, indeed nothing would persuade me to that"—and he shivered as though at some wretched recollection. "But there must be evidence; there is such a noise about these executions and questionings that they won't allow any more of them in Leyden without decent evidence; even Alva and the Blood

Council are getting a bit frightened. Well, who can furnish better testimony than that jackass, my worthy son, Adrian? Probably, however, he has a conscience somewhere, so it may be as well not to let him know that when he thinks himself engaged in conversation he is really in the witness box. Let me see, we must take the old fellow, Dirk, on the ground of heresy, and the youngster and the serving man on a charge of murdering the king's soldiers and assisting the escape of heretics with their goods. Murder sounds bad, and, especially in the case of a young man, excites less public sympathy than common heresy."

Then he went to the door, calling, "Meg, hostess mine, Meg."

He might have saved himself the trouble, however, since, on opening it suddenly, that lady fell almost into his arms.

"What!" he said, "listening, oh, fie! and all for nothing. But there, ladies will be curious and"—this to himself—"I must be more careful. Lucky I didn't talk aloud."

Then he called her in, and having inspected the chamber narrowly, proceeded to make certain arrangements.

CHAPTER XVII

BETROTHED

At nightfall on the morrow Adrian returned as appointed, and was admitted into the same room, where he found Black Meg, who greeted him openly by name and handed to him a tiny phial containing a fluid clear as water. This, however, was scarcely to be wondered at, seeing that it was water and nothing else.

"Will it really work upon her heart?" asked Adrian, eyeing the stuff.

"Ay," answered the hag, "that's a wondrous medicine, and those who drink it go crazed with love for the giver. It is compounded according to the Master's own receipt, from very costly tasteless herbs that grow only in the deserts of Arabia."

Adrian understood, and fumbled in his pocket. Meg stretched out her hand to receive the honorarium. It was a long, skinny hand, with long, skinny fingers, but there was this peculiarity about it, that one of these fingers chanced to be missing. She saw his eyes fixed upon the gap, and rushed into an explanation.

"I have met with an accident," Meg explained. "In cutting up a pig the chopper caught this finger and severed it."

"Did you wear a ring on it?" asked Adrian.

"Yes," she replied, with sombre fury.

"How very strange!" ejaculated Adrian.

"Why?"

"Because I have seen a finger, a woman's long finger with a gold ring on it, that might have come off your hand.

I suppose the pork-butcher picked it up for a keep-sake."

"May be, Heer Adrian, but where is it now?"

"Oh! it is, or was, in a bottle of spirits tied by a thread to the cork."

Meg's evil face contorted itself. "Get me that bottle," she said hoarsely. "Look you, Heer Adrian, I am doing much for you, do this for me."

"What do you want it for?"

"To give it Christian burial," she replied sourly. "It is not fitting or lucky that a person's finger should stand about in a bottle like a caul or a lizard. Get it, I say get it—I ask no question where—or, young man, you will have little help in your love affairs from me."

"Do you wish the dagger hilt also?" he asked mischievously.

She looked at him out of the corners of her black eyes. This Adrian knew too much.

"I want the finger and the ring on it which I lost in chopping up the pig."

"Perhaps, mother, you would like the pig, too. Are you not making a mistake? Weren't you trying to cut his throat, and didn't he bite off the finger?"

"If I want the pig, I'll search his stye. You bring that bottle, or——"

She did not finish her sentence, for the door opened, and through it came the sage.

"Quarrelling," he said in a tone of reproof. "What about? Let me guess," and he passed his hand over his shadowed brow. "Ah! I see, there is a finger in it, a finger of fate? No, not that," and, moved by a fresh inspiration, he grasped Meg's hand, and added, "Now I have it. Bring it back, friend Adrian, bring it back; a dead finger is most unlucky to all save its owner. As a favour to me."

"Very well," said Adrian.

"My gifts grow," mused the master. "I have a vision of this honest hand and of a great sword—but, there, it is not worth while, too small a matter. Leave us, mother. It shall be returned, my word on it. Yes, gold ring and all. And now, young friend, let us talk. You have the philtre? Well, I can promise you that it is a good one, it would almost bring Galatea from her marble. Pygmalion must have known that secret. But tell me something of your life, your daily thoughts and daily deeds, for when I give my friendship I love to live in the life of my friends."

Thus encouraged, Adrian told him a great deal, so much, indeed, that the Señor Ramiro, nodding in the shadow of his hood, began to wonder whether the spy behind the cupboard door, expert as he was, could possibly make his pen keep pace with these outpourings. Oh! it was a dreary task, but he kept to it, and by putting in a sentence here and there artfully turned the conversation to matters of faith.

"No need to fence with me," he said presently. "I know how you have been brought up, how through no fault of your own you have wandered out of the warm bosom of the true Church to sit at the clay feet of the conventicle. You doubt it? Well, let me look again, let me look. Yes, only last week you were seated in a whitewashed room overhanging the market-place. I see it all—an ugly little man with a harsh voice is preaching, preaching what I think blasphemy. Baskets—baskets? What have baskets to do with him?"

"I believe he used to make them," interrupted Adrian, taking the bait.

"That may be it, or perhaps he will be buried in one; at any rate he is strangely mixed up with baskets. Well, there are others with you, a middle-aged, heavy-faced man, is he not Dirk van Goorl, your stepfather? And—wait—a

young fellow with rather a pleasant face, also a relation. I see his name, but I can't spell it. F—F—o—i, faith in the French tongue, odd name for a heretic."

"F-o-y—Foy," interrupted Adrian again.

"Indeed! Strange that I should have mistaken the last letter, but in the spirit sight and hearing these things chance: then there is a great man with a red beard."

"No, Master, you're wrong," said Adrian with emphasis; "Martin was not there; he stopped behind to watch the house."

"Are you sure?" asked the seer doubtfully. "I look and I seem to see him," and he stared blankly at the wall.

"So you might see him often enough, but not at last week's meeting."

It is needless to follow the conversation further. The seer, by aid of a ball of crystal that he produced from the folds of his cloak, described his spirit visions, and the pupil corrected them from his intimate knowledge of the facts, until the Señor Ramiro and his confederates in the cupboard had enough evidence, as evidence was understood in those days, to burn Dirk, Foy, and Martin three times over, and, if it should suit him, Adrian also. Then for that night they parted.

Next evening Adrian was back again with the finger in the bottle, which Meg grabbed as a pike snatches at a frog, and further fascinating conversation ensued. Indeed, Adrian found this well of mystic lore tempered with shrewd advice upon love affairs and other worldly matters, and with flattery of his own person and gifts, singularly attractive.

Several times did he return thus, for as it chanced Elsa had been unwell and kept her room, so that he discovered no opportunity of administering the magic philtre that was to cause her heart to burn with love for him.

At length, when even the patient Ramiro was almost

worn out by the young gentleman's lengthy visits, the luck changed. Elsa appeared one day at dinner, and with great adroitness Adrian, quite unseen of anyone, contrived to empty the phial into her goblet of water, which, as he rejoiced to see, she drank to the last drop.

But no opportunity such as he sought ensued, for Elsa, overcome, doubtless, by an unwonted rush of emotion, retired to battle against it in her own chamber. Since it was impossible to follow and propose to her there, Adrian, possessing his soul in such patience as he could command, sat in the sitting-room to await her return, for he knew that it was not her habit to go out until five o'clock. As it happened, however, Elsa had other arrangements for this afternoon, since she had promised to accompany Lysbeth upon several visits to the wives of neighbours, and then to meet her cousin Foy at the factory and walk with him in the meadows beyond the town.

So while Adrian, lost in dreams, waited in the sitting-room Elsa and Lysbeth left the house by the side door.

They had paid three of their visits when their path chanced to lead them past the old town prison which was called the Gevangenhuis. This place formed one of the gateways of the city, for it was built in the walls and opened on to the moat, water surrounding it on all sides. In front of its massive door, that was guarded by two soldiers, a small crowd had gathered on the drawbridge and in the street beyond, apparently in expectation of somebody or something. Lysbeth looked at the three-storied frowning building and shuddered, for it was here that heretics were put upon their trial, and here, too, many of them were done to death after the dreadful fashion of the day.

"Hasten," she said to Elsa, as she pushed through the crowd, "for doubtless some horror passes here."

"Have no fear," answered an elderly and good-natured



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"IT IS RAMIRO . . . RAMIRO THE SPY"

woman who overheard her, "we are only waiting to hear the new governor of the prison read his deed of appointment."

As she spoke the doors were thrown open and a man—he was a well-known executioner named Baptiste—came out carrying a sword in one hand and a bunch of keys on a salver in the other. After him followed the governor gallantly dressed and escorted by a company of soldiers and the officials of the prison. Drawing a scroll from beneath his cloak he began to read it rapidly and in an almost inaudible voice.

It was his commission as governor of the prison signed by Alva himself, and set out in full his powers, which were considerable, his responsibilities which were small, and other matters, excepting only the sum of money that he had paid for the office, that, given certain conditions, was, as a matter of fact, sold to the highest bidder. As may be guessed, this post of governor of a gaol in one of the large Netherland cities was lucrative enough to those who did not object to such a fashion of growing rich. So lucrative was it, indeed, that the salary supposed to attach to the office was never paid; at least its occupant was expected to help himself to it out of heretical pockets.

As he finished reading through the paper the new governor looked up, to see, perhaps, what impression he had produced upon his audience. Now Elsa saw his face for the first time and gripped Lysbeth's arm.

"It is Ramiro," she whispered, "Ramiro the spy, the man who dogged my father at The Hague."

As well might she have spoken to a statue. Indeed, of a sudden Lysbeth seemed to be smitten into stone, for there she stood staring with a blanched and meaningless face at the face of the man opposite to her. Well might she stare, for she also knew him. Across the gulf of years, one-eyed, bearded, withered, scarred as he was by suffering, passion and evil thoughts, she knew him, for there before her stood one whom she deemed dead, the wretch whom she had

believed to be her husband, Juan de Montalvo. Some magnetism drew his gaze to her; out of all the faces of that crowd it was hers that leapt to his eye. He trembled and grew white; he turned away, and swiftly was gone back into the hell of the Gevangenhuis. Like a demon he had come out of it to survey the human world beyond, and search for victims there; like a demon he went back into his own place. So at least it seemed to Lysbeth.

"Come, come," she muttered and, drawing the girl with her, passed out of the crowd.

Elsa began to talk in a strained voice that from time to time broke into a sob.

"That is the man," she said. "He hounded down my father; it was his wealth he wanted, but my father swore that he would die before he should win it, and he is dead—dead in the Inquisition, and that man is his murderer."

Lysbeth made no answer, never a word she uttered, till presently they halted at a mean and humble door. Then she spoke for the first time in cold and constrained accents.

"I am going in here to visit the Vrouw Jansen; you have heard of her, the wife of him whom they burned. She sent to me to say that she is sick, I know not of what, but there is smallpox about; I have heard of four cases of it in the city, so, cousin, it is wisest that you should not enter here. Give me the basket with the food and wine. Look, yonder is the factory, quite close at hand, and there you will find Foy. Oh! never mind Ramiro. What is done is done. Go and walk with Foy, and for a while forget—Ramiro."

At the door of the factory Elsa found Foy awaiting her, and they walked together through one of the gates of the city into the pleasant meadows that lay beyond. At first they did not speak much, for each of them was occupied with thoughts which pressed their tongues to silence. When they were clear of the town, however, Elsa could contain

herself no more; indeed, the anguish awakened in her mind by the sight of Ramiro working upon nerves already overstrung had made her half-hysterical. She began to speak; the words broke from her like water from a dam which it has breached. She told Foy that she had seen the man, and more—much more. All the misery which she had suffered, all the love for the father who was lost to her.

At last Elsa ceased outworn, and, standing still there upon the river bank she wrung her hands and wept. Till now Foy had said nothing, for his good spirits and cheerful readiness seemed to have forsaken him. Even now he said nothing. All he did was to put his arms about this sweet maid's waist, and, drawing her to him, to kiss her upon brow and eyes and lips. She did not resist; it never seemed to occur to her to show resentment; indeed, she let her head sink upon his shoulder like the head of a little child, and there sobbed herself to silence. At last she lifted her face and asked very simply:

"What do you want with me, Foy van Goorl?"

"What?" he repeated; "why I want to be your husband."

"Is this a time for marrying and giving in marriage?" she asked again, but almost as though she were speaking to herself.

"I don't know that it is," he replied, "but it seems the only thing to do, and in such days two are better than one."

She drew away and looked at him, shaking her head sadly. "My father," she began——

"Yes," he interrupted brightening, "thank you for mentioning him, that reminds me. He wished this, so I hope now that he is gone you will take the same view."

"It is rather late to talk about that, isn't it, Foy?" she stammered, looking at his shoulder and smoothing her

ruffled hair with her small white hand. "But what do you mean?"

So word for word, as nearly as he could remember it, he told her all that Hendrik Brant had said to him in the cellar at The Hague before they had entered upon the desperate adventure of their flight to the Haarlemer Meer. "He wished it, you see," he ended.

"My thought was always his thought, and—Foy—I wish it also."

"Priceless things are not lightly won," said he, quoting Brant's words as though by some afterthought.

"There he must have been talking of the treasure, Foy," she answered, her face lightening to a smile.

"Ay, of the treasure, sweet, the treasure of your dear heart."

"A poor thing, Foy, but I think that—it rings true."

"It had need, Elsa, yet the best of coin may crack with rough usage."

"Mine will wear till death, Foy."

"I ask no more, Elsa. When I am dead, spend it elsewhere; I shall find it again above where there is no marrying or giving in marriage."

"There would be but small change left to spend, Foy, so look to your own gold and—see that you do not alter its image and superscription, for metal will melt in the furnace, and each queen has her stamp."

"Enough," he broke in impatiently. "Why do you talk of such things, and in these riddles which puzzle me?"

"Because, because, we are not married yet, and—the words are not mine—precious things are dearly won. Perfect love and perfect peace cannot be bought with a few sweet words and kisses; they must be earned in trial and tribulation."

"Of which I have no doubt we shall find plenty," Foy replied cheerfully. "Meanwhile, the kisses make a good road to travel on."

After this Elsa did not argue any more.

At length they turned and walked homeward through the quiet evening twilight, hand clasped in hand, and were happy in their way. It was not a very demonstrative way, for the Dutch have never been excitable, or at least they do not show their excitement. Moreover, the conditions of this betrothal were peculiar; it was as though their hands had been joined from a deathbed, the deathbed of Hendrik Brant, the martyr of The Hague, whose new-shed blood cried out to Heaven for vengeance. This sense pressing on both of them did not tend towards rapturous outbursts of youthful passion, and even if they could have shaken it off and let their young blood have rein, there remained another sense—that of dangers ahead of them.

"Two are better than one," Foy had said, and for her own reasons she had not wished to argue the point, still Elsa felt that to it there was another side. If two could comfort each other, could help each other, could love each other, could they not also suffer for each other? In short, by doubling their lives, did they not also double their anxieties, or if children should come, treble and quadruple them? This is true of all marriage, but how much more was it true in such days and in such a case as that of Foy and Elsa, both of them heretics, both of them rich, and, therefore, both liable at a moment's notice to be haled to the torment and the stake? Knowing these things, and having but just seen the hated face of Ramiro, it is not wonderful that although she rejoiced as any woman must that the man to whom her soul turned had declared himself her lover, Elsa could only drink of this joyful cup with a chastened and a fearful spirit. Nor is it wonderful that even in the hour of his triumph Foy's buoyant and hope-

ful nature was chilled by the shadow of her fears and the forebodings of his own heart.

When Lysbeth parted from Elsa that afternoon she went straight to the chamber of the Vrouw Jansen. It was a poor place, for after the execution of her husband his wretched widow had been robbed of all her property and now existed upon the charity of her co-religionists. Lysbeth found her in bed, an old woman nursing her, who said that she thought the patient was suffering from a fever. Lysbeth leant over the bed and kissed the sick woman, but started back when she saw that the glands of her neck were swollen into great lumps, while the face was flushed and the eyes so bloodshot as to be almost red. Still she knew her visitor, for she whispered:

"What is the matter with me, Vrouw van Goorl? Is it the smallpox coming on? Tell me, friend, the doctor would not speak."

"I fear that it is worse; it is the plague," said Lysbeth, startled into candour.

The poor girl laughed hoarsely. "Oh! I hoped it," she said. "I am glad, I am glad, for now I shall die and go to join him. But I wish that I had caught it before," she rambled on to herself "for then I would have taken it to him in prison and they couldn't have treated him as they did." Suddenly she seemed to come to herself, for she added, "Go away, Vrouw van Goorl, go quickly or you may catch my sickness."

"If so, I am afraid that the mischief is done, for I have kissed you," answered Lysbeth. "But I do not fear such things, though perhaps if I took it, this would save me many a trouble. Still, there are others to think of, and I will go." So, having knelt down to pray awhile by the patient, and given the old nurse the basket of soup and food, Lysbeth went.

Next morning she heard that the Vrouw Jansen was dead, the pest that struck her being of the most fatal sort.

Lysbeth knew that she had run great risk, for there is no disease more infectious than the plague. She determined, therefore, that so soon as she reached home she would burn her dress and other articles of clothing and purify herself with the fumes of herbs. Then she dismissed the matter from her mind, which was already filled with another thought, a dominant, soul-possessing thought.

Oh God, Montalvo had returned to Leyden! Out of the blackness of the past, out of the gloom of the galleys, had arisen this evil genius of her life; yes, and, by a strange fatality, of the life of Elsa Brant also, since it was he, she swore, who had dogged down her father. Lysbeth was a brave woman, one who had passed through many dangers, but her whole heart turned sick with terror at the sight of this man, and sick it must remain till she, or he, were dead. She could well guess what he had come to seek. It was that cursed treasure of Hendrik Brant's which had drawn him. She knew from Elsa that for a year at least the man Ramiro had been plotting to steal this money at The Hague. He had failed there, failed with overwhelming and shameful loss through the bravery and resource of her son Foy and their henchman, Red Martin. Now he had discovered their identity; he was aware that they held the secret of the hiding-place of that accursed hoard, they and no others, and he had established himself in Leyden to wring it out of them. It was clear, clear as the setting orb of the red sun before her. She knew the man—had she not lived with him?—and there could be no doubt about it, and—he was the new governor of the Gevangenhuis. Doubtless he has purchased that post for his own dark purposes and—to be near them.

Sick and half blind with the intensity of her dread, Lysbeth staggered home. She must tell Dirk, that was her one thought; but no, she had been in contact with the plague, first she must purify herself. So she went to her room, and although it was summer, lit a great fire on the hearth, and in it burned her garments. Then she bathed and fumigated her hair and body over a brazier of strong herbs, such as in those days of frequent and virulent sickness housewives kept at hand, after which she dressed herself afresh and went to seek her husband. She found him at a desk in his private room reading some paper, which at her approach he shuffled into a drawer.

"What is that, Dirk?" she asked with sudden suspicion.

He pretended not to hear, and she repeated the query.

"Well, wife, if you wish to know," he answered in his blunt fashion, "it is my will."

"Why are you reading your will?" she asked again, beginning to tremble, for her nerves were afire, and this simple accident struck her as something awful and ominous.

"For no particular reason, wife," he replied quietly, "only we all must die, early or late. There is no escape from that, and in these times it is more often early than late, so it is as well to be sure that everything is in order for those who come after us. Now, since we are on the subject, which I have never cared to speak about, listen to me."

"What about, husband?"

"Why, about my will. Look you, Hendrik Brant and his treasure have taught me a lesson. I am not a man of his substance, or a tenth of it, but in some countries I should be called rich, for I have worked hard and God has prospered me. Well, of late I have been realising where I could, also the bulk of my savings is in cash. But the cash is not here, not in this country at all. You know my correspondents, Munt and Brown, of Norwich, in England,

to whom we ship our goods for the English market. They are honest folk, and Munt owes me everything, almost to his life. Well, they have the money, it has reached them safely, thanks be to God, and with it a counterpart of this my will duly attested, and here is their letter of acknowledgment stating that they have laid it out carefully at interest upon mortgage on great estates in Norfolk where it lies to my order, or that of my heirs, and that a duplicate acknowledgment has been filed in their English registries in case this should go astray. Little remains here except this house and the factory, and even on those I have raised money. Meanwhile the business is left to live on, and beyond it the rents which will come from England, so that whether I be living or dead you need fear no want. But what is the matter with you, Lysbeth? You look strange."

"Oh! husband, husband," she gasped, "Juan de Montalvo is here again. He has appeared as the new governor of the gaol. I saw him this afternoon, I cannot be mistaken, although he has lost an eye and is much changed."

Dirk's jaw dropped and his florid face whitened. "Juan de Montalvo!" he said. "I heard that he was dead long ago."

"You are mistaken, husband, a devil never dies. He is seeking Brant's treasure, and he knows that we have its secret. You can guess the rest. More, now that I think of it, I have heard that a strange Spaniard is lodging with Hague Simon, he whom they call the Butcher, and Black Meg, of whom we have cause to know. Doubtless it is he, and—Dirk, death overshadows us."

"Why should he know of Brant's treasure, wife?"

"Because *he is Ramiro*, the man who dogged him down, the man who followed the ship *Swallow* to the Haarlemer Meer. Elsa was with me this afternoon, she knew him again."

Dirk thought a while, resting his head upon his hand. Then he lifted it and said:

"I am very glad that I sent the money to Munt and Brown, Heaven gave me that thought. Well, wife, what is your counsel now?"

"My counsel is that we should fly from Leyden—all of us, yes, this very night before worse happens."

He smiled. "That cannot be; there are no means of flight, and under the new laws we could not pass the gates; that trick has been played too often. Still, in a day or two, when I have had time to arrange, we might escape if you still wish to go."

"To-night, to-night," she urged, "or some of us stay for ever."

"I tell you, wife, it is not possible. Am I a rat that I should be bolted from my hole thus by this ferret of a Montalvo? I am a man of peace and no longer young, but let him beware lest I stop here long enough to pass a sword through him."

"So be it, husband," she replied, "but I think it is through my heart that the sword will pass," and she burst out weeping.

Supper that night was a somewhat melancholy meal. Dirk and Lysbeth sat at the ends of the table in silence. On one side of it were placed Foy and Elsa, who were also silent for a very different reason, while opposite to them was Adrian, who watched Elsa with an anxious and inquiring eye.

That the love potion worked he was certain, for she looked confused and a little flushed; also, as would be natural under the circumstances, she avoided his glance and made pretence to be interested in Foy, who seemed rather more stupid than usual. Well, so soon as he could find his chance all this would be cleared up, but mean-

while the general gloom and silence were affecting his nerves.

"What have you been doing this afternoon, mother?" Adrian asked presently.

"I, son?" she replied with a start, "I have been visiting the unhappy Vrouw Jansen, whom I found very sick."

"What is the matter with her, mother?"

Lysbeth's mind, which had wandered away, again returned to the subject in hand with an effort.

"The matter? Oh! she has the plague."

"The plague!" exclaimed Adrian, springing to his feet, "do you mean to say you have been consorting with a woman who has the plague?"

"I fear so," she answered with a smile, "but do not be frightened, Adrian, I have burnt my clothes and fumigated myself."

Still Adrian was frightened. His recent experience of sickness had been ample, and although he was no coward he had a special dislike of infectious diseases, which at the time were many.

"It is horrible," he said, "horrible. I only hope that we—I mean you—may escape. The house is unbearably close. I am going to walk in the courtyard," and away he went, for the moment, at any rate, forgetting all about Elsa and the love potion.

CHAPTER XVIII

FOY SEES A VISION

NEVER since that day when, many years before, she had bought the safety of the man she loved by promising herself in marriage to his rival, had Lysbeth slept so ill as she did upon this night. Montalvo was alive. Montalvo was here, here to strike down and destroy those whom she loved, and triple armed with power, authority, and desire to do the deed. Well she knew that when there was plunder to be won, he would not step aside or soften until it was in his hands. Yet there was hope in this; he was not a cruel man, as she knew also, that is to say, he had no pleasure in inflicting suffering for its own sake; such methods he used only as a means to an end. If he could get the money, all of it, she was sure that he would leave them alone. Why should he not have it? Why should all their lives be menaced because of this trust which had been thrust upon them?

Unable to endure the torment of her doubts and fears, Lysbeth woke her husband, who was sleeping peacefully at her side, and told him what was passing in her mind.

"It is a true saying," answered Dirk with a smile, "that even the best of women are never quite honest when their interest pulls the other way. What, wife, would you have us buy our own peace with Brant's fortune, and thus break faith with a dead man and bring down his curse upon us?"

"The lives of men are more than gold, and Elsa would consent," she answered sullenly; "already this pelf is

stained with blood, the blood of Hendrik Brant himself, and of Hans the pilot."

"Yes, wife, and since you mention it, with the blood of a good many Spaniards also, who tried to steal the stuff. Let's see; there must have been several drowned at the mouth of the river, and quite twenty went up with the *Swallow*, so the loss has not been all on our side. Listen, Lysbeth, listen. It was my cousin, Hendrik Brant's, belief that in the end this great fortune of his would do some service to our people or our country, for he wrote as much in his will and repeated it to Foy. I know not when or in what fashion this may come about; how can I know? But first will I die before I hand it over to the Spaniard. Moreover, I cannot, since its secret was never told to me."

"Foy and Martin have it."

"Lysbeth," said Dirk sternly, "I charge you as you love me do not work upon them to betray their trust; no, not even to save my life or your own—if we must die, let us die with honour. Do you promise?"

"I promise," she answered with dry lips, "but on this condition only, that you fly from Leyden with us all, to-night if maybe."

"Good," answered Dirk, "a halfpenny for a herring; you have made your promise, and I'll give you mine; that's fair, although I am old to seek a new home in England. But it can't be to-night, wife, for I must make arrangements. There is a ship sailing to-day, and we might catch her to-morrow at the river's mouth, after she has passed the officers, for her captain is a friend of mine. How will that do?"

"I had rather it had been to-night," said Lysbeth. "While we are in Leyden with that man we are not safe from one hour to the next."

"Wife, we are never safe. It is all in the hands of God, and, therefore, we should live like soldiers awaiting the

hour to march, and rejoice exceedingly when it pleases our Captain to sound the call."

"I know," she answered; "but, oh! Dirk, it would be hard—to part."

He turned his head aside for a moment, then said in a steady voice, "Yes, wife, but it will be sweet to meet again and part no more."

While it was still early that morning Dirk summoned Foy and Martin to his wife's chamber. Adrian for his own reasons he did not summon, making the excuse that he was still asleep, and it would be a pity to disturb him; nor Elsa, since as yet there was no necessity to trouble her. Then, briefly, for he was given to few words, he set out the gist of the matter, telling them that the man Ramiro whom they had beaten on the Haarlemer Meer was in Leyden, which Foy knew already, for Elsa had told him as much, and that he was no other than the Spaniard named the Count Juan de Montalvo, the villain who had deceived Lysbeth into a mock marriage by working on her fears, and who was the father of Adrian. All this time Lysbeth sat in a carved oak chair listening with a stony face to the tale of her own shame and betrayal. She made no sign at all beyond a little twitching of her fingers, till Foy, guessing what she suffered in her heart, suddenly went to his mother and kissed her. Then she wept a few silent tears, for an instant laid her hand upon his head as though in blessing, and, motioning him back to his place, became herself again—stern, unmoved, observant.

Next Dirk, taking up his tale, spoke of his wife's fears, and of her belief that there was a plot to wring out of them the secret of Hendrik Brant's treasure.

"Happily," he said, addressing Foy, "neither your mother nor I, nor Adrian, nor Elsa, know that secret; you and Martin know it alone, you and perhaps one other who

is far away and cannot be caught. We do not know it, and we do not wish to know it, and whatever happens to any of us, it is our earnest hope that neither of you will betray it, even if our lives, or your lives, hang upon the words, for we hold it better that we should keep our trust with a dead man at all costs than that we should save ourselves by breaking faith. Is it not so, wife?"

"It is so," answered Lysbeth hoarsely.

"Have no fear," said Foy. "We will die before we betray."

"We will try to die before we betray," grumbled Martin in his deep voice, "but flesh is frail and God knows."

"Oh! I have no doubt of you, honest man," said Dirk with a smile, "for you have no mother and father to think of in this matter."

"Then, master, you are foolish," replied Martin, "for I repeat it—flesh is frail, and I always hated the look of a rack. However, I have a handsome legacy charged upon this treasure, and perhaps the thought of that would support me. Alive or dead, I should not like to think of my money being spent by any Spaniard."

While Martin spoke the strangeness of the thing came home to Foy. Here were four of them, two of whom knew a secret and two who did not, while those who did not implored those who did to impart to them nothing of the knowledge which, if they had it, might serve to save them from a fearful doom. Then for the first time in his young and inexperienced life he understood how great erring men and women can be and what patient majesty dwells in the human heart, that for the sake of a trust it does not seek can yet defy the most hideous terrors of the body and the soul. Indeed, that scene stamped itself upon his mind in such fashion that throughout his long existence he never quite forgot it for a single day. His mother, clad in her frilled white cap and grey gown, seated cold-faced and reso-

lute in the oaken chair. His father, to whom, although he knew it not, he was now speaking for the last time, standing by her, his hand resting upon her shoulder and addressing them in his quiet, honest voice. Martin standing also but a little to one side and behind, the light of the morning playing upon his great red beard; his round, pale eyes glittering as was their fashion when wrathful, and himself, Foy, leaning forward to listen, every nerve in his body strung tight with excitement, love, and fear.

Oh! he never forgot it, which is not strange, for so great was the strain upon him, so well did he know that this scene was but the prelude to terrible events, that for a moment, only for a moment, his steady reason was shaken and he saw a vision. Martin, the huge, patient, ox-like Martin, was changed into a red Vengeance; he saw him, great sword aloft, he heard the roar of his battle cry, and lo! before him men went down to death, and about him the floor seemed purple with their blood. His father and his mother, too; they were no longer human, they were saints —see the glory which shone over them, and look, too, the dead Hendrik Brant was whispering in their ears. And he, Foy, he was beside Martin playing his part in those red frays as best he might, and playing it not in vain.

Then all passed, and a wave of peace rolled over him, a great sense of duty done, of honour satisfied, of reward attained. Lo! the play was finished, and its ultimate meaning clear, but before he could read and understand —it had gone.

He gasped and shook himself, gripping his hands together.

"What have you seen, son?" asked Lysbeth, watching his face.

"Strange things, mother," Foy answered. "A vision of war for Martin and me, of glory for my father and you, and of eternal peace for us all."

"It is a good omen, Foy," she said. "Fight your fight and leave us to fight ours. 'Through much tribulation we must enter into the Kingdom of God,' where at last there is a rest remaining for us all. It is a good omen. Your father was right and I was wrong. Now I have no more fear; I am satisfied."

None of them seemed to be amazed or to find these words wonderful and out of the common. For them the hand of approaching Doom had opened the gates of Distance, and they knew everyone that through these some light had broken on their souls, a faint flicker of dawn from beyond the clouds. They accepted it in thankfulness.

"I think that is all I have to say," said Dirk in his usual voice. "No, it is not all," and he told them of his plan for flight. They listened and agreed to it, yet to them it seemed a thing far off and unreal. None of them believed that this escape would ever be carried out. All of them believed that here in Leyden they would endure the fiery trial of their faith and win each of them its separate crown.

When everything was discussed, and each had learned the lesson of what he must do that day, Foy asked if Adrian was to be told of the scheme. To this his father answered hastily that the less it was spoken of the better, therefore he proposed to tell Adrian late that night only, when he could make up his mind whether he would accompany them or stay in Leyden.

"Then he shan't go out to-night, and will come with us as far as the ship only if I can manage it," muttered Martin beneath his breath, but aloud he said nothing. Somehow it did not seem to him to be worth while to make trouble about it, for he knew that if he did his mistress and Foy, who believed so heartily in Adrian, would be angry.

"Father and mother," said Foy again, "while we are gathered here there is something I wish to say to you."

"What is it, son?" asked Dirk.

"Yesterday I became affianced to Elsa Brant, and we wish to ask your consent and blessing."

"That will be gladly given, son, for I think this very good news. Bring her here, Foy," answered Dirk.

But although in his hurry Foy did not notice it, his mother said nothing. She liked Elsa well indeed—who would not?—but oh! this brought them a step nearer to that accursed treasure, the treasure which from generation to generation had been hoarded up that it might be a doom to men. If Foy were affianced to Elsa, it was his inheritance as well as hers, for those trusts of Hendrik Brant's will were to Lysbeth things unreal and visionary, and its curse would fall upon him as well as upon her. Moreover it might be said that he was marrying her to win the wealth.

"This betrothal does not please you; you are sad, wife," said Dirk, looking at her quickly.

"Yes, husband, for now I think that we shall never get out of Leyden. I pray that Adrian may not hear of it, that is all."

"Why, what has he to do with the matter?"

"Only that he is madly in love with the girl. Have you not seen it? And—you know his temper."

"Adrian, Adrian, always Adrian," answered Dirk impatiently. "Well, it is a very fitting match, for if she has a great fortune hidden somewhere in a swamp, which in fact she has not, since the bulk of it is bequeathed to me to be used for certain purposes; he has, or will have, moneys also—safe at interest in England. Hark! here they come, so, wife, put on a pleasant face; they will think it unlucky if you do not smile."

As he spoke Foy re-entered the room, leading Elsa by the hand, and she looked as sweet a maid as ever the sun shone on. So they told their story, and kneeling down before

Dirk, received his blessing in the old fashion, and very glad were they in the after years to remember that it had been so received. Then they turned to Lysbeth, and she also lifted up her hand to bless them, but ere ever it touched their heads, do what she would to check it, a cry forced its way to her lips, and she said:

"Oh! children, doubtless you love each other well, but is this a time for marrying and giving in marriage?"

"My own words, my very words," exclaimed Elsa, springing to her feet and turning pale.

Foy looked vexed. Then recovering himself and trying to smile, he said:

"And I give them the same answer—that two are better than one; moreover, this is a betrothal, not a marriage."

"Ay," muttered Martin behind, thinking aloud after his fashion, "betrothal is one thing and marriage another," but low as he spoke Elsa overheard him.

"Your mother is upset," broke in Dirk, "and you can guess why, so do not disturb her more at present. Let us to our business, you and Martin to the factory to make arrangements there as I have told you, and I, after I have seen the captain, to whatever God shall call me to do. So, till we meet again, farewell, my son—and daughter," he added, smiling at Elsa.

They left the room, but as Martin was following them Lysbeth called him back.

"Go armed to the factory, Martin," she said, "and see that your young master wears that steel shirt beneath his jerkin."

Martin nodded and went.

Adrian woke up that morning in an ill mood. He had, it is true, administered his love potion with singular dexterity and success, but as yet he reaped no fruit from his labours, and was desperately afraid lest the effect of the

magic draught might wear off. When he came downstairs it was to find that Foy and Martin were already departed to the factory, and that his stepfather had gone out, whither he knew not. This was so much to the good, for it left the coast clear. Still he was none the better off, since either his mother and Elsa had taken their breakfast upstairs, or they had dispensed with that meal. His mother he could spare, especially after her recent contact with a plague patient, but under the circumstances Elsa's absence was annoying. Moreover, suddenly the house had become uncomfortable, for every one in it seemed to be running about carrying articles hither and thither in a fashion so aimless that it struck him as little short of insane. Once or twice also he saw Elsa, but she, too, was carrying things, and had no time for conversation.

At length Adrian wearied of it and departed to the factory with the view of making up his books, which, to tell the truth, had been somewhat neglected of late, to find that here, too, the same confusion reigned. Instead of attending to his ordinary work, Martin was marching to and fro bearing choice pieces of brassware, which were being packed into crates, and he noticed, for Adrian was an observant young man, that he was not wearing his usual artisan's dress. Why, he wondered to himself, should Martin walk about a factory upon a summer's day clad in his armour of quilted bull's hide, and wearing his great sword Silence strapped round his middle? Why, too, should Foy have removed the books and be engaged in going through them with a clerk? Was he auditing them? If so, he wished him joy of the job, since to bring them to a satisfactory balance had proved recently quite beyond his own powers. Not that there was anything wrong with the books, for he, Adrian, had kept them quite honestly according to his very imperfect lights, only things must have been left out, for balance they would not. Well, on the whole, he

was glad, since a man filled with lover's hopes and fears was in no mood for arithmetical exercises, so, after hanging about for a while, he returned home to dinner.

The meal was late, an unusual occurrence, which annoyed him; moreover, neither his mother nor his stepfather appeared at table. At length Elsa came in looking pale and worried, and they began to eat, or rather to go through the form of eating, since neither of them seemed to have any appetite. Nor, as the servant was continually in the room, and as Elsa took her place at one end of the long table while he was at the other, had their *tête-à-tête* any of the usual advantages.

At last the waiting-woman went away, and, after a few moments' pause, Elsa rose to follow. By this time Adrian was desperate. He would bear it no more; things must be brought to a head.

"Elsa," he said, in an irritated voice, "everything seems to be very uncomfortable to-day, there is so much disturbance in the house that one might imagine we were going to shut it up and leave Leyden."

Elsa looked at him out of the corners of her eyes; probably by this time she had learnt the real cause of the disturbance.

"I am sorry, Heer Adrian," she said, "but your mother is not very well this morning."

"Indeed; I only hope she hasn't caught the plague from the Jansen woman; but that doesn't account for everybody running about with their hands full, like ants in a broken nest, especially as it is not the time of year when women turn all the furniture upside down and throw the curtains out of the windows in the pretence that they are cleaning them. However, we are quiet here for a while, so let us talk."

Elsa became suspicious. "Your mother wants me, Heer Adrian," she said, turning towards the door.

"Let her rest, Elsa, let her rest; there is no medicine like sleep for the sick."

Elsa pretended not to hear him, so, as she still headed for the door, by a movement too active to be dignified, he placed himself in front of it, adding, "I have said that I want to speak with you."

"And I have said that I am busy, Heer Adrian, so please let me pass."

Adrian remained immovable. "Not until I have spoken to you," he said.

Now as escape was impossible Elsa drew herself up and asked in a cold voice:

"What is your pleasure? I pray you, be brief."

Adrian cleared his throat, reflecting that she was keeping the workings of the love potion under wonderful control; indeed to look at her no one could have guessed that she had recently absorbed this magic Eastern medicine. However, something must be done; he had gone too far to draw back.

"Elsa," he said boldly, though no hare could have been more frightened, "Elsa," and he clasped his hands, and looked at the ceiling, "I love you and the time has come to say so."

"If I remember right it came some time ago, Heer Adrian," she replied with sarcasm. "I thought that by now you had forgotten all about it."

"Forgotten!" he sighed, "forgotten! With you ever before my eyes how can I forget?"

"I am sure I cannot say," she answered, "but I know that I wish to forget this folly."

"Folly! She calls it folly!" he mused aloud. "Oh, Heaven, folly is the name she gives to the life-long adoration of my bleeding heart!"

"You have known me exactly five weeks, Heer Adrian——"

"Which, sweet lady, makes me desire to know you for fifty years."

Elsa sighed, for she found the prospect dreary.

"Come," he went on with a gush, "forego this virgin coyness, you have done enough and more than enough for honour, now throw aside pretence, lay down your arms and yield. No hour, I swear, of this long fight will be so happy to you as that of your sweet surrender, for remember, dear one, that I, your conqueror, am in truth the conquered. I, abandoning——"

He got no further, for at this point the sorely tried Elsa lost control of herself, but not in the fashion which he hoped for and expected.

"Are you crazed, Heer Adrian," she asked, "that you should insist thus in pouring this high-flown nonsense into my ears when I have told you that it is unwelcome to me? I understand that you ask me for my love. Well, once for all I tell you that I have none to give."

This was a blow, since it was impossible for Adrian to put a favourable construction upon language so painfully straightforward. His self-conceit was pierced at last and collapsed like a pricked bladder.

"None to give!" he gasped, "none to give! You don't mean to tell me that you have given it to anybody else?"

"Yes, I do," she answered, for by now Elsa was thoroughly angry.

"Indeed," he replied loftily. "Let me see; last time it was your lamented father who occupied your heart. Perhaps now it is that excellent giant, Martin, or even—no, it is too absurd"—and he laughed in his jealous rage, "even the family buffoon, my worthy brother Foy."

"Yes," she replied quietly, "it is Foy."

"Foy! Foy! Hear her, ye gods! My successful rival, mine, is the yellow-headed, muddy-brained, unlettered Foy—and they say that women have souls! Of your courtesy,

answer me one question. Tell me when did this strange and monstrous thing happen? When did you declare yourself vanquished by the surpassing charms of Foy?"

"Yesterday afternoon, if you want to know," she said in the same calm and ominous voice.

Adrian heard, and an inspiration took him. He dashed his hand to his brow and thought a moment; then he laughed loud and shrilly.

"I have it," he said. "It is the love charm which has worked perversely. Elsa, you are under a spell, poor woman; you do not know the truth. I gave you the philtre in your drinking water, and Foy, the traitor Foy, has reaped its fruits. Dear girl, shake yourself free from this delusion, it is I whom you really love, not that base thief of hearts, my brother Foy."

"What do you say? You gave me a philtre? You dare to doctor my drink with your heathen nastiness? Out of the way, sir! Stand off, and never venture to speak to me again. Well will it be for you if I do not tell your brother of your infamy."

What happened after this Adrian could never quite remember, but a vision remained of himself crouching to one side, and of a door flung back so violently that it threw him against the wall; a vision, too, of a lady sweeping past him with blazing eyes and lips set in scorn. That was all.

For a while he was crushed, quite crushed; the blow had gone home. Adrian was not only a fool, he was also the vainest of fools. That any young woman on whom he chose to smile should actually reject his advances was bad and unexpected; that she should do so in favour of another man was worse, but that the other man should be Foy—oh! this was infamous and inexplicable. He was handsomer than Foy, no one would dream of denying it. He was cleverer and better read, had he not mastered the contents of every known romance—high-souled works which Foy

bluntly declared were rubbish and refused even to open? Was he not a poet? But remembering a certain sonnet he did not follow this comparison. In short, how was it conceivable that a woman looking upon himself, a very type of the chivalry of Spain, silver-tongued, a follower—nay, a companion of the Muses, one to whom in every previous adventure of the heart to love had been to conquer, could still prefer that broad-faced, painfully commonplace, if worthy, young representative of the Dutch middle classes, Foy van Goorl?

It never occurred to Adrian to ask himself another question, namely, how it comes about that eight young women out of ten are endowed with an intelligence or instinct sufficiently keen to enable them to discriminate between an empty-headed popinjay of a man, intoxicated with the fumes of his own vanity, and an honest young fellow of stable character and sterling worth? Not that Adrian was altogether empty-headed, for in some ways he was clever; also beneath all this foam and froth the Dutch strain inherited from his mother had given a certain ballast and determination to his nature. Thus, when his heart was thoroughly set upon a thing, he could be very dogged and patient. Now it *was* set upon Elsa Brant, he did truly desire to win her above any other woman, and that he had left a different impression upon her mind was owing solely to the affected air and grandiloquent style of language culled from his precious romances which he thought it right to assume when addressing a lady upon matters of the affections.

For a little while he was prostrate, his heart seemed swept clean of all hope and feeling. Then his furious temper, the failing that, above every other, was his curse and bane, came to his aid and occupied it like the seven devils of Scripture, bringing in its train his re-awakened vanity, hatred, jealousy, and other maddening pas-

sions. It could not be true, there must be an explanation, and, of course, the explanation was that Foy had been so fortunate, or so cunning as to make advances to Elsa soon after she had swallowed the love philtre. Adrian, like most people in his day, was very superstitious and credulous. It never even occurred to him to doubt the almost universally accepted power and efficacy of this witch's medicine, though even now he understood what a fool he was when, in his first outburst of rage, he told Elsa that he had trusted to such means to win her affections, instead of letting his own virtues and graces do their natural work.

Well, the mischief was done, the poison was swallowed, but—most poisons have their antidotes. Why was he lingering here? He must consult his friend, the Master, and at once.

Ten minutes later Adrian was at Black Meg's house.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FRAY IN THE SHOT TOWER

THE door was opened by Hague Simon, the bald-headed, great-paunched villain who lived with Black Meg. In answer to his visitor's anxious inquiries the Butcher said, searching Adrian's face with his pig-like eyes the while, that he could not tell for certain whether Meg was or was not at home. He rather thought that she was consulting the spirits with the Master, but they might have passed out without his knowing it, "for they had great gifts—great gifts," and he wagged his fat head as he showed Adrian into the accustomed room.

It was an uncomfortable kind of chamber which, in some unexplained way, always gave Adrian the impression that people, or presences, were stirring in it whom he could not see. Also in this place there happened odd and unaccountable noises; creakings, and sighings which seemed to proceed from the walls and ceiling. Of course, such things were to be expected in a house where sojourned one of the great magicians of the day. Still he was not altogether sorry when the door opened and Black Meg entered, although some might have preferred the society of almost any ghost.

"What is it, that you disturb me at such an hour?" she asked sharply.

"What is it? What isn't it?" Adrian replied, his rage rising at the thought of his injuries. "That cursed philtre of yours has worked all wrong, that's what it is. Another man has got the benefit of it, don't you understand, you

old hag? And, by Heaven! I believe he means to abduct her, yes, that's the meaning of all the packing and fuss, blind fool that I was not to guess it before. The Master—I will see the Master. He must give me an antidote, another medicine——"

"You certainly look as though you want it," interrupted Black Meg drily. "Well, I doubt whether you can see him; it is not his hour for receiving visitors; moreover, I don't think he's here, so I shall have to signal for him."

"I must see him. I will see him," shouted Adrian.

"I daresay," replied Black Meg, squinting significantly at his pocket.

Enraged as he was Adrian took the hint.

"Woman, you seek gold," he said, quoting involuntarily from the last romance he had read, and presenting her with a handful of small silver, which was all he had.

Meg took the silver with a sniff, on the principle that something is better than nothing, and departed gloomily. Then followed more mysterious noises; voices whispered, doors opened and shut, furniture creaked, after which came a period of exasperating and rather disagreeable silence. Adrian turned his face to the wall, for the only window in the room was so far above his head that he was unable to look out of it; indeed, it was more of a skylight than a window. Thus he remained a while gnawing at the ends of his moustache and cursing his fortune, till presently he felt a hand upon his shoulder.

"Who the devil is that?" he exclaimed, wheeling round to find himself face to face with the draped and majestic form of the Master.

"The devil! That is an ill word upon young lips, my friend," said the sage, shaking his head in reproof.

"I daresay," replied Adrian, "but what the—I mean how did you get here? I never heard the door open."

"How did I get here? Well, now you mention it, I

wonder how I did. The door—what have I to do with doors?"

"I am sure I don't know," answered Adrian shortly, "but most people find them useful."

"Enough of such material talk," interrupted the sage with sternness. "Your spirit cried to mine, and I *am* here, let that suffice."

"I suppose that Black Meg fetched you," went on Adrian, sticking to his point, for the philtre fiasco had made him suspicious.

"Verily, friend Adrian, you can suppose what you will; and now, as I have little time to spare, be so good as to set out the matter. Nay, what need, I know all, for have I not—is this the case? You administered the philtre to the maid and neglected my instructions to offer yourself to her at once. Another saw it and took advantage of the magic draught. While the spell was on her he proposed, he was accepted—yes, your brother Foy. Oh! fool, careless fool, what else did you expect?"

"At any rate I didn't expect that," replied Adrian in a fury. "And now, if you have all the power you pretend, tell me what I am to do."

Something glinted ominously beneath the hood, it was the sage's one eye.

"Young friend," he said, "your manner is brusque, yes, even rude. But I understand and I forgive. Come, we will take counsel together. Tell me what has happened."

Adrian told him with much emphasis, and the recital of his adventures seemed to move the Master deeply, at any rate he turned away, hiding his face in his hands, while his back trembled with the intensity of his feelings.

"The matter is grave," he said solemnly, when at length the lovesick and angry swain had finished. "There is but one thing to be done. Your treacherous rival—oh! what

fraud and deceit are hidden beneath that homely countenance—has been well advised, by whom I know not, though I suspect one, a certain practitioner of the Black Magic, named Arentz——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Adrian.

"I see you know the man. Beware of him. He is, indeed, a wolf in sheep's clothing, who wraps his devilish incantations in a cloak of seditious doctrine. Well, I have thwarted him before, for can Darkness stand before Light? and, by the help of those who aid me, I may thwart him again. Now, attend and answer my questions clearly, slowly and truthfully. If the girl is to be saved to you, mark this, young friend, your cunning rival must be removed from Leyden for a while until the charm works out its power."

"You don't mean—" said Adrian, and stopped.

"No, no. I mean the man no harm. I mean only that he must take a journey, which he will do fast enough, when he learns that his witchcrafts and other crimes are known. Now answer, or make an end, for I have more business to attend to than the love-makings of a foo—of a headstrong youth. First: What you have told me of the attendances of Dirk van Goorl, your stepfather, and others of his household, namely, Red Martin and your half-brother Foy, at the tabernacle of your enemy, the wizard Arentz, is true, is it not?"

"Yes," answered Adrian, "but I do not see what that has to do with the matter."

"Silence!" thundered the Master. Then he paused a while, and Adrian seemed to hear certain strange squeakings proceeding from the walls. The sage remained lost in thought till the squeakings ceased. Again he spoke:

"What you have told me of the part played by the said Foy and the said Martin as to their sailing away with the treasure of the dead heretic, Hendrik Brant, and of the

murders committed by them in the course of its hiding in the Haarlemer Meer, is true, is it not?"

"Of course it is," answered Adrian, "but——"

"Silence!" again thundered the sage, "or by my Lord Zoroaster, I throw up the case."

Adrian collapsed, and there was another pause.

"You believe," he went on again, "that the said Foy and the said Dirk van Goorl, together with the said Martin, are making preparations to abduct that innocent and unhappy maid, the heiress, Elsa Brant, for evil purposes of their own?"

"I never told you so," said Adrian, "but I think it is a fact; at least there is a lot of packing going on."

"You never told me! Do you not understand that there is no need for you to tell me anything?"

"Then, in the name of your Lord Zoroaster, why do you ask?" exclaimed the exasperated Adrian.

"That you will know presently," he answered musing.

Once more Adrian heard the strange squeaking as of young and hungry rats.

"I think that I will not take up your time any more," he said, growing thoroughly alarmed, for really the proceedings were a little odd, and he rose to go.

The Master made no answer, only, which was curious conduct for a sage, he began to whistle a tune.

"By your leave," said Adrian, for the magician's back was against the door. "I have business——"

"And so have I," replied the sage, and went on whistling.

Then suddenly the side of one of the walls seemed to fall out, and through the opening emerged a man wrapped in a priest's robe, and after him, Hague Simon, Black Meg, and another particularly evil-looking fellow.

"Got it all down?" asked the Master in an easy, everyday kind of voice.

The monk bowed, and producing several folios of manu-

script, laid them on the table together with an ink-horn and a pen.

"Very well. And now, my young friend, be so good as to sign there, at the foot of the writing."

"Sign what?" gasped Adrian.

"Explain to him," said the Master. "He is quite right; a man should know what he puts his name to."

Then the monk spoke in a low, business-like voice.

"This is the information of Adrian, called Van Goorl, as taken down from his own lips, wherein, among other things, he deposes to certain crimes of heresy, murder of the king's subjects, an attempted escape from the king's dominions, committed by his stepfather, Dirk van Goorl, his half-brother, Foy van Goorl, and their servant, a Frisian known as Red Martin. Shall I read the papers? It will take some time."

"If the witness so desires," said the Master.

"What is that document for?" whispered Adrian in a hoarse voice.

"To persuade your treacherous rival, Foy van Goorl, that it will be desirable in the interests of his health that he should retire from Leyden for a while," sneered his late mentor, while the Butcher and Black Meg sniggered audibly. Only the monk stood silent, like a black watching fate.

"I'll not sign!" shouted Adrian. "I have been tricked! There is treachery!" and he bent forward to spring for the door.

Ramiro made a sign, and in another instant the Butcher's fat hands were about Adrian's throat, and his thick thumbs were digging viciously at the victim's windpipe. Still Adrian kicked and struggled, whereon, at a second sign, the villainous-looking man drew a great knife, and, coming up to him, pricked him gently on the nose.

Then Ramiro spoke to him very suavely and quietly.



"I'LL NOT SIGN! I HAVE BEEN TRICKED!"



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"Young friend," he said, "where is that faith in me which you promised, and why, when I wish you to sign this quite harmless writing, do you so violently refuse?"

"Because I won't betray my stepfather and brother," gasped Adrian. "I know why you want my signature," and he looked at the man in a priest's robe.

"You won't betray them," sneered Ramiro. "Why, you young fool, you have already betrayed them fifty times over, and what is more, which you don't seem to remember, you have betrayed yourself. Now look here. If you choose to sign that paper, or if you don't choose, makes little difference to me, for, dear pupil, I would almost as soon have your evidence by word of mouth."

"I may be a fool," said Adrian, turning sullen; "yes, I see now that I have been a fool to trust in you and your sham arts, but I am not fool enough to give evidence against my own people in any of your courts. What I have said I said never thinking that it would do them harm."

"Not caring whether it would do them harm or no," corrected Ramiro, "as you had your own object to gain—the young lady whom, by the way, you were quite ready to doctor with a love medicine."

"Because love blinded me," said Adrian loftily.

Ramiro put his hand upon his shoulder and shook him slightly as he answered:

"And has it not struck you, you vain puppy, that other things may blind you also—hot irons, for instance?"

"What do you mean?" gasped Adrian.

"I mean that the rack is a wonderful persuader. Oh! it makes the most silent talk and the most solemn sing. Now take your choice. Will you sign or will you go to the torture chamber?"

"What right have you to question me?" asked Adrian, striving to build up his tottering courage with bold words.

"Just this right—that I to whom you speak am the Cap-

tain and Governor of the Gevangenhuis in this town, an official who has certain powers."

Adrian turned pale but said nothing.

"Our young friend has gone to sleep," remarked Ramiro, reflectively. "Here you, Simon, twist his arm a little. No, not the right arm; he may want that to sign with, which will be awkward if it is out of joint: the other."

With an ugly grin the Butcher, taking his fingers from Adrian's throat, gripped his captive's left wrist, and very slowly and deliberately began to screw it round.

Adrian groaned.

"Painful, isn't it?" said Ramiro. "Well, I have no more time to waste, break his arm."

Then Adrian gave in, for he was not fitted to bear torture; his imagination was too lively.

"I will sign," he whispered, the perspiration pouring from his pale face.

"Are you quite sure you do it willingly?" queried his tormentor, adding, "another little half-turn, please, Simon; and you, Mistress Meg, if he begins to faint, just prick him in the thigh with your knife."

"Yes, yes," groaned Adrian.

"Very good. Now here is the pen. Sign."

So Adrian signed.

"I congratulate you upon your discretion, pupil," remarked Ramiro, as he scattered sand on the writing and pocketed the paper. "To-day you have learned a very useful lesson which life teaches to most of us, namely, that the inevitable must rule our little fancies. Let us see; I think that by now the soldiers will have executed their task, so, as you have done what I wished, you can go, for I shall know where to find you if I want you. But, if you will take my advice, which I offer as that of one friend to another, you will hold your tongue about the events of this afternoon. Unless you speak of it, nobody need ever know

that you have furnished certain useful information, for in the Gevangenhuis the names of witnesses are not mentioned to the accused. Otherwise you may possibly come into trouble with your heretical friends and relatives. Good afternoon. Butcher, be so good as to open the door for this gentleman."

A minute later Adrian found himself in the street, towards which he had been helped by the kick of a heavy boot. His first impulse was to run, and he ran for half a mile or more without stopping, till at length he paused breathless in a deserted street, and, leaning against the wheel of an unharnessed waggon, tried to think. Think! How could he think? His mind was one mad whirl; rage, shame, disappointed passion, all boiled in it like bones in a knacker's cauldron. He had been fooled, he had lost his love, and, oh! infamy, he had betrayed his kindred to the hell of the Inquisition. They would be tortured and burnt. Yes, even his mother and Elsa might be burned, since those devils respected neither age nor sex, and their blood would be upon his head. It was true that he had signed under compulsion, but who would believe that, for had they not taken down his talk word for word? For once Adrian saw himself as he was; the cloaks of vanity and self-love were stripped from his soul, and he knew what others would think when they came to learn the story. He thought of suicide; there was water, here was steel, the deed would not be difficult. No, he could not; it was too horrible. Moreover, how dared he enter the other world so unprepared, so steeped in every sort of evil? What, then, could he do to save his character and those whom his folly had betrayed? He looked round him; there, not three hundred yards away, rose the tall chimney of the factory. Perhaps there was yet time; perhaps he could still warn Foy and Martin of the fate which awaited them.

Acting on the impulse of the moment, Adrian started

forward, running like a hare. As he approached the buildings he saw that the workmen had left, for the big doors were shut. He raced round to the small entrance; it was open—he was through it, and figures were moving in the office. God be praised! They were Foy and Martin. To them he sped, a white-faced creature with gaping mouth and staring eyes, to look at more like a ghost than a human being.

Martin and Foy saw him and shrank back. Could this be Adrian, they thought, or was it an evil vision?

"Fly!" he gasped. "Hide yourselves! The officers of the Inquisition are after you!" Then another thought struck him, and he stammered, "My father and mother. I must warn them!" and before they could speak he had turned and was gone, as he went crying, "Fly! Fly!"

Foy stood astonished till Martin struck him on the shoulder, and said roughly:

"Come, let us get out of this. Either he is mad, or he knows something. Have you your sword and dagger? Quick, then."

They passed through the door, which Martin paused to lock, and into the courtyard. Foy reached the gate first, and looked through its open bars. Then very deliberately he shot the bolts and turned the great key.

"Are you brain-sick," asked Martin, "that you lock the gate on us?"

"I think not," replied Foy, as he came back to him. "It is too late to escape. Soldiers are marching down the street."

Martin ran and looked through the bars. It was true enough. There they came, fifty men or more, a whole company, heading straight for the factory, which it was thought might be garrisoned for defence.

"Now I can see no help but to fight for it," Martin said cheerfully, as he hid the keys in the bucket of the well, which he let run down to the water.

"What can two men do against fifty?" asked Foy, lifting his steel-lined cap to scratch his head.

"Not much, still, with good luck, something. At least, as nothing but a cat can climb the walls, and the gateway is stopped, I think we may as well die fighting as in the torture-chamber of the Gevangenhuis, for that is where they mean to lodge us."

"I think so too," answered Foy, taking courage. "Now how can we hurt them most before they quiet us?"

Martin looked round reflectively. In the centre of the courtyard stood a building not unlike a pigeon-house, or the shelter that is sometimes set up in the middle of a market beneath which merchants gather. In fact it was a shot tower, where leaden bullets of different sizes were cast and dropped through an opening in the floor into a shallow tank below to cool, for this was part of the trade of the foundry.

"That would be a good place to hold," he said; "and crossbows hang upon the walls."

Foy nodded, and they ran to the tower, but not without being seen, for as they set foot upon its stair, the officer in command of the soldiers called upon them to surrender in the name of the King. They made no answer, and as they passed through the doorway, a bullet from an arquebus struck its woodwork.

The shot tower stood upon oaken piles, and the chamber above, which was round, and about twenty feet in diameter, was reached by a broad ladder of fifteen steps, such as is often used in stables. This ladder ended in a little landing of about six feet square, and to the left of the landing opened the door of the chamber where the shot were cast. They went up into the place.

"What shall we do now?" said Foy, "barricade the door?"

"I can see no use in that," answered Martin, "for then

they would batter it down, or perhaps burn a way through it. No; let us take it off its hinges and lay it on blocks about eight inches high, so that they may catch their shins against it when they try to rush us."

"A good notion," said Foy, and they lifted off the narrow oaken door and propped it up on four moulds of metal across the threshold, weighting it with other moulds. Also they strewed the floor of the landing with three-pound shot, so that men in a hurry might step on them and fall. Another thing they did, and this was Foy's notion. At the end of the chamber were the iron baths in which the lead was melted, and beneath them furnaces ready laid for the next day's founding. These Foy set alight, pulling out the dampers to make them burn quickly, and so melt the leaden bars which lay in the troughs.

"They may come underneath," he said, pointing to the trap through which the hot shot were dropped into the tank, "and then molten lead will be useful."

Martin smiled and nodded. Then he took down a crossbow from the walls, for in those days, when every dwelling and warehouse might have to be used as a place of defence, it was common to keep a good store of weapons hung somewhere ready to hand, and went to the narrow window which overlooked the gate.

"As I thought," he said. "They can't get in and don't like the look of the iron spikes, so they are fetching a smith to burst it open. We must wait."

Very soon Foy began to fidget, for this waiting to be butchered by an overwhelming force told upon his nerves. He thought of Elsa and his parents, whom he would never see again; he thought of death and all the terrors and wonders that might lie beyond it; death whose depths he must so soon explore. He had looked to his crossbow, had tested the string and laid a good store of quarrels on the floor beside him; he had taken a pike from the walls and

seen to its shaft and point; he had stirred the fires beneath the leaden bars till they roared in the sharp draught.

"Is there nothing more to do?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Martin, "we might say our prayers; they will be the last," and suiting his action to the word, the great man knelt down, an example which Foy followed.

"Do you speak," said Foy, "I can't think of anything."

So Martin began a prayer which is perhaps worthy of record:—

"O Lord," he said, "forgive me all my sins, which are too many to count, or at least I haven't the time to try, and especially for cutting off the head of the executioner with his own sword, although I had no death quarrel against him, and for killing a Spaniard in a boxing match. O Lord, I thank you very much because you have arranged for us to die fighting instead of being tortured and burnt in the gaol, and I pray that we may be able to kill enough Spaniards first to make them remember us for years to come. O Lord, protect my dear master and mistress, and let the former learn that we have made an end of which he would approve, but if may be, hide it from the Pastor Arentz, who might think that we ought to surrender. That is all I have to say. Amen."

Then Foy did his own praying, and it was hearty enough, but we need scarcely stop to set down its substance.

Meanwhile the Spaniards had found a blacksmith, who was getting to work upon the gate, for they could see him through the open upper bars.

"Why don't you shoot?" asked Foy. "You might catch him with a bolt."

"Because he is a poor Dutchman whom they have pressed for the job, while they stand upon one side. We must wait till they break down the gate. Also we must fight well when the time comes, Master Foy, for, see, folk are watching us, and they will expect it," and he pointed upwards.

Foy looked. The foundry courtyard was surrounded by tall gabled houses, and of these the windows and balconies were already crowded with spectators. Word had gone round that the Inquisition had sent soldiers to seize one of the young Van Goorls and Red Martin—that they were battering at the gates of the factory. Therefore the citizens, some of them their own workmen, gathered there, for they did not think that Red Martin and Foy van Goorl would be taken easily.

The hammering at the gate went on, but it was very stout and would not give.

"Martin," said Foy presently, "I am frightened. I feel quite sick. I know that I shall be no good to you when the pinch comes."

"Now I am sure that you are a brave man," answered Martin with a short laugh, "for otherwise you would never have owned that you feel afraid. Of course you feel afraid, and so do I. It is the waiting that does it; but when once the first blow has been struck, why, you will be as happy as a priest. Look you, master. So soon as they begin to rush the ladder, do you get behind me, close behind, for I shall want all the room to sweep with my sword, and if we stand side by side we shall only hinder each other, while with a pike you can thrust past me, and be ready to deal with any who win through."

"You mean that you want to shelter me with your big carcase," answered Foy. "But you are captain here. At least I will do my best," and putting his arms about the great man's middle, he hugged him affectionately.

"Look! look!" cried Martin. "The gate is down. Now, first shot to you," and he stepped to one side.

As he spoke the oaken doors burst open and the Spanish soldiers began to stream through them. Suddenly Foy's nerve returned to him and he grew steady as a rock. Lifting his crossbow he aimed and pulled the trigger. The

string twanged, the quarrel rushed forth with a whistling sound, and the first soldier, pierced through breastplate and through breast, sprang into the air and fell forward. Foy stepped to one side to string his bow.

"Good shot," said Martin taking his place, while from the spectators in the windows went up a sudden shout. Martin fired and another man fell. Then Foy fired again and missed, but Martin's next bolt struck the last soldier through the arm and pinned him to the timber of the broken gate. After this they could shoot no more, for the Spaniards were beneath them.

"To the doorway," said Martin, "and remember what I told you. Away with the bows, cold steel must do the rest."

Now they stood by the open door, Martin, a helmet from the walls upon his head, tied beneath his chin with a piece of rope because it was too small for him, the great sword Silence lifted ready to strike, and Foy behind gripping the long pike with both hands. Below them from the gathered mob of soldiers came a confused clamour, then a voice called out an order and they heard footsteps on the stair.

"Look out; they are coming," said Martin, turning his head so that Foy caught sight of his face. It was transfigured, it was terrible. The great red beard seemed to bristle, the pale blue unshaded eyes rolled and glittered, they glittered like the blue steel of the sword Silence that wavered above them. In that dread instant of expectancy Foy remembered his vision of the morning. Lo! it was fulfilled, for before him stood Martin, the peaceful, patient giant, transformed into a Red Vengeance.

A man reached the head of the ladder, stepped upon one of the loose cannon-balls and fell with an oath and a crash. But behind him came others. Suddenly they turned the corner, suddenly they burst into view, three or four of them together. Gallantly they rushed on. The first of

them caught his feet in the trap of the door and fell headlong across it. Of him Martin took no heed, but Foy did, for before ever the soldier could rise he had driven his pike down between the man's shoulders, so that he died there upon the door. At the next Martin struck, and Foy saw this one suddenly grow small and double up, which, if he had found leisure to examine the nature of that wound, would have surprised him very little. Another man followed so quickly that Martin could not lift the sword to meet him. But he pointed with it, and next instant was shaking his carcase off its blade.

After this Foy could keep no count. Martin slashed with the sword, and when he found a chance Foy thrust with the pike, till at length there were none to thrust at, for this was more than the Spaniards had bargained. Two of them lay dead in the doorway, and others had been dragged or had tumbled down the ladder, while from the onlookers at the windows without, as they caught sight of them being brought forth slain or sorely wounded, went up shout upon shout of joy.

"So far we have done very well," said Martin quietly, "but if they come up again, we must be cooler and not waste our strength so much. Had I not struck so hard, I might have killed another man."

But the Spaniards showed no sign of coming up any more; they had seen enough of that narrow way and of the red swordsman who awaited them in the doorway round the corner. Indeed it was a bad place for attackers, since they could not shoot with arquebuses or arrows, but must pass in to be slaughtered like sheep at the shambles in the dim room beyond. So, being cautious men who loved their lives, they took a safer counsel.

The tank beneath the shot-tower, when it was not in use, was closed with a stone cover, and around this they piled firewood and peats from a stack in the corner of the yard,



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TWO MEN . . . BURSTING THROUGH THE BARRIER OF FLAMING WOOD

and standing in the centre out of the reach of arrows, set light to it. Martin lay down watching them through a crack in the floor. Then he signed to Foy, and whispered, and going to the iron baths, Foy drew from them two large buckets of molten lead, each as much as a man could carry. Again Martin looked through the crack, waiting till several of the burners were gathered beneath. Then, with a swift motion he lifted up the trap-door, and as those below stared upwards wondering, full into their faces came the buckets of molten lead. Down went two of them never to speak more, while others ran out shrieking and aflame, tearing at their hair and garments.

After this the Spaniards grew more wary, and built their fires round the oak piers till the flames eating up them fired the building, and the room above grew full of little curling wreaths of smoke.

"Now we must choose," said Martin, "whether we will be roasted like fowls in an oven, or go down and have our throats cut like pigs in the open."

"For my part, I mean to die in the air," coughed Foy.

"So say I, master. Listen. We can't get down the stair, for they are watching for us there, so we must drop from the trap-door and charge through the fire. Then, if we are lucky, back to back and fight it out."

Half a minute later two men bearing naked swords in their hands might be seen bursting through the barrier of flaming wood. Out they came safely enough, and there in an open space not far from the gateway, halted back to back, rubbing the water from their smarting eyes. On them, a few seconds later, like hounds on a wounded boar, dashed the mob of soldiers, while from every throat of the hundreds who were watching went up shrill cries of encouragement, grief, and fear. Men fell before them, but others rushed in. They were down, they were up again, once more they were down, and this time only one of them rose,

the great man Martin. He staggered to his feet, shaking off the soldiers who tried to hold him, as a dog in the game-pit shakes off rats. He was up, he stood across the body of his companion, and once more that fearful sword was sweeping round, bringing death to all it touched. They drew back, but a soldier, old in war, creeping behind him suddenly threw a cloak over his head. Then the end came, and slowly, very slowly, they overmatched his strength, and bore him down and bound him, while the watching mob groaned and wept with grief.

CHAPTER XX

IN THE GEVANGENHUIS

WHEN Adrian left the factory he ran on to the house in the Bree Straat.

"Oh! what has happened?" said his mother as he burst into the room where she and Elsa were at work.

"They are coming for him," he gasped. "The soldiers from the Gevangenhuis. Where is he? Let him escape quickly—my stepfather."

Lysbeth staggered and fell back into her chair.

"How do you know?" she asked.

At the question Adrian's head swam and his heart stood still. Yet his lips found a lie.

"I overheard it," he said; "the soldiers are attacking Foy and Martin in the factory, and I heard them say that they were coming here for him."

Elsa moaned aloud, then she turned on him like a tiger, asking:

"If so, why did you not stay to help them?"

"Because," he answered with a touch of his old pomposity, "my first duty was towards my mother and you."

"He is out of the house," broke in Lysbeth in a low voice that was dreadful to hear. "He is out of the house, I know not where. Go, son, and search for him. Swift! Be swift!"

So Adrian went forth, not sorry to escape the presence of these tormented women. Here and there he wandered to one haunt of Dirk's after another, but without success, till at length a noise of tumult drew him, and he ran towards

the sound. Presently he was round the corner, and this was what he saw.

Advancing down the wide street leading to the Gevangenhuis came a body of Spanish soldiers, and in the centre of them were two figures whom it was easy for Adrian to recognise—Red Martin and his brother Foy. Martin, although his bull-hide jerkin was cut and slashed and his helmet had gone, seemed to be little hurt, for he was still upright and proud, walking along with his arms lashed behind him, while a Spanish officer held the point of a sword, his own sword Silence, near his throat ready to drive it home should he attempt to escape. With Foy the case was different. At first Adrian thought that he was dead, for they were carrying him upon a ladder. Blood fell from his head and legs, while his doublet seemed literally to be rent to pieces with sword-cuts and dagger-thrusts; and in truth had it not been for the shirt of mail which he wore beneath, he must have been slain several times over. But Foy was not dead, for as Adrian watched he saw his head turn upon the ladder and his hand rise up and fall again.

But this was not all, for behind appeared a cart drawn by a grey horse, and in it were the bodies of Spanish soldiers—how many Adrian could not tell, but there they lay with their harness still on them. After these again, in a long and melancholy procession, marched other Spanish soldiers, some of them sorely wounded, and, like Foy, carried upon doors or ladders, and others limping forward with the help of their comrades. No wonder that Martin walked proudly to his doom, since behind him came the rich harvest of the sword Silence. Also, there were other signs to see and hear, since about the cavalcade surged and roared a great mob of the citizens of Leyden.

"Bravo, Martin! Well fought, Foy van Goorl!" they shouted, "We are proud of you! We are proud of you!" Then from the back of the crowd someone cried, "Rescue

them!'' "Kill the Inquisition dogs!" "Tear the Spaniards to pieces!"

A stone flew through the air, then another and another, but at a word of command the soldiers faced about and the mob drew back, for they had no leader. So it went on till they were within a hundred yards of the Gevangenhuis.

"Don't let them be murdered," cried the voice. "A rescue! a rescue!" and with a roar the crowd fell upon the soldiers. It was too late, for the Spaniards, trained to arms, closed up and fought their way through, taking their prisoners with them. But they cost them dear, for the wounded men, and those who supported them, were cut off. They were cut off, they were struck down. In a minute they were dead, every one of them, and although they still held its fortresses and walls, from that hour the Spaniards lost their grip of Leyden, nor did they ever win it back again. From that hour to this Leyden has been free. Such were the first fruits of the fight of Foy and Martin against fearful odds.

The great doors of oak and iron of the Gevangenhuis clashed to behind the prisoners, the locks were shot, and the bars fell home, while outside raved the furious crowd.

The place was not large nor very strong, merely a drawbridge across the narrow arm of moat, a gateway with a walled courtyard beyond, and over it a three-storied house built in the common Dutch fashion, but with straight barred windows. To the right, under the shadow of the archway, which, space being limited, was used as an armoury, and hung with weapons, lay the court-room where prisoners were tried, and to the left a vaulted place with no window, not unlike a large cellar in appearance. This was the torture-chamber. Beyond was the courtyard, and at the back of it rose the prison. In this yard were waiting the new governor of the jail, Ramiro, and with him a little red-faced, pig-eyed man dressed in a rusty doublet. He

was the Inquisitor of the district, especially empowered as delegate of the Blood Council and under various edicts and laws to try and to butcher heretics.

The officer in command of the troops advanced to make his report.

"What is all that noise?" asked the Inquisitor in a frightened, squeaky voice. "Is this city also in rebellion?"

"And where are the rest of you?" said Ramiro, scanning the thin files.

"Sir," answered the officer saluting, "the rest of us are dead. Some were killed by this red rogue and his companion, and the mob have the others."

Then Ramiro began to curse and to swear, as well he might, for he knew that when this story reached headquarters, his credit with Alva and the Blood Council would be gone.

"Coward!" he yelled, shaking his fist in the face of the officer. "Coward to lose a score or more of men in taking a brace of heretics."

"Don't blame me, sir," answered the man sullenly, for the word stirred his bile, "blame the mob and this red devil's steel, which went through us as though we were wet clay," and he handed him the sword Silence.

"It fits the man," muttered Montalvo, "for few else could wield such a blade. Go hang it in the gateway, it may be wanted in evidence," but to himself he thought, "Bad luck again, the luck that follows me whenever I pit myself against Lysbeth van Hout." Then he gave an order, and the two prisoners were taken away up some narrow stairs.

At the top of the first flight was a solid door through which they passed, to find themselves in a large and darksome place. Down the centre of this place ran a passage. On either side of the passage, dimly lighted by high iron-

barred windows, were cages built of massive oaken bars, and measuring each of them eight or ten feet square, very dens such as might have served for wild beasts, but filled with human beings charged with offences against the doctrines of the Church. Those who chance to have seen the prison of the Inquisition at The Hague as it still stands to-day, will know what they were like.

Into one of these dreadful holes they were thrust, Foy, wounded as he was, being thrown roughly upon a heap of dirty straw in the corner. Then, having bolted and locked the door of their den, the soldiers left them.

As soon as his eyes grew accustomed to the light, Martin stared about him. The conveniences of the dungeon were not many; indeed, being built above the level of the ground, it struck the imagination as even more terrible than any subterranean vault devoted to the same dreadful purpose. By good fortune, however, in one corner of it stood an earthenware basin and a large jug of water.

"I will take the risk of its being poisoned," thought Martin to himself, as lifting the jug he drank deep of it, for what between fighting, fire and fury there seemed to be no moisture left in him. Then, his burning thirst satisfied at last, he went to where Foy lay unconscious and began to pour water, little by little, into his mouth, which, senseless as he was, he swallowed mechanically and presently groaned a little. Next, as well as he could, Martin examined his comrade's wounds, to find that what had made him insensible was a cut upon the right side of the head, which, had it not been for his steel-lined cap, must certainly have killed him, but as it was, beyond the shock and bruise, seemed in no way serious.

His second hurt was a deep wound in the left thigh, but being on the outside of the limb, although he bled much it had severed no artery. Other injuries he had also upon the forearms and legs, also beneath the chain shirt his

body was bruised with the blows of swords and daggers, but none of these were dangerous.

Martin stripped him as tenderly as he might and washed his wounds. Then he paused, for both of them were wearing garments of flannel, which is unsuitable for the dressing of hurts.

"You need linen," said a woman's voice, speaking from the next den. "Wait awhile and I will give you my smock."

"How can I take your garment, lady, whoever you may be," answered Martin, "to bind about the limbs of a man even if he is wounded?"

"Take it and welcome," answered the unknown in sweet, low tones, "I want it no more; they are going to execute me to-night."

"Execute you to-night?" muttered Martin.

"Yes," replied the voice, "in the court-room or one of the cellars, I believe, as they dare not do it outside because of the people. By beheading—am I not fortunate? Only by beheading."

"Oh! God, where art Thou?" groaned Martin.

"Don't be sorry for me," answered the voice, "I am very glad. There were three of us, my father, my sister, and I, and—you can guess—well, I wish to join them. Also it is better to die than to go through what I have suffered again. But here is the garment. I fear that it is stained about the neck, but it will serve if you tear it into strips," and a trembling, delicate hand, which held the linen, was thrust between the oaken bars.

Even in that light, however, Martin saw that the wrist was cut and swollen. He saw it, and because of that tender, merciful hand he registered an oath about priests and Spaniards, which, as it chanced, he lived to keep very thoroughly. Also, he paused awhile wondering if all this was of any good, wondering if it would not be best to let Foy die at once, or even to kill him.

"What are you thinking about, sir?" asked the lady on the other side of the bars.

"I am thinking," answered Martin, "that perhaps my young master here would be better dead, and that I am a fool to stop the bleeding."

"No, no," said the sweet voice, "do your utmost and leave the rest to God. It pleases God that I should die, which matters little as I am but a weak girl; it may please Him that this young man shall live to be of service to his country and his faith. I say, bind up the wounds, good sir."

"Perhaps you are right," answered Martin. "Who knows, there's a key to every lock, if only it can be found." Then he set to wŏrk upon Foy's wounds, binding them round with strips of the girl's garment dipped in water, and when he had done the best he could he clothed him again, even to the chain shirt.

"Are you not hurt yourself?" asked the voice presently.

"A little, nothing to speak of; a few cuts and bruises, that's all; this bull's hide turned their swords."

"Tell me whom you have been fighting," she said.

So, to while away the time while Foy still lay senseless, Martin told her the story of the attack upon the shot tower, of how they had driven the Spaniards down the ladder, of how they had drenched them with molten lead, and of their last stand in the courtyard when they were forced from the burning building.

"Oh! what a fearful fight—two against so many," said the voice with a ring of admiration in it.

"Yes," answered Martin, "it was a good fight—the hottest that ever I was in. For myself I don't much care, for they've paid a price for my carcase. I didn't tell you, did I, that the mob set on them as they haled us here and pulled four wounded men and those who carried them to

bits? Oh! yes, they have paid a price, a very good price for a Frisian boor and a Leyden burgher."

"God pardon their souls," murmured the unknown.

"That's as He likes," said Martin, "and no affair of mine; I had only to do with their bodies and—" At this moment Foy groaned, sat up and asked for something to drink.

Martin gave him water from the pitcher.

"Where am I?" he asked, and he told him.

"Martin, old fellow," said Foy in an uncertain voice, "we are in a very bad way, but as we have lived through this"—here his characteristic hopefulness asserted itself—"I believe, I believe that we shall live through the rest."

"Yes, young sir," echoed the thin, faint notes out of the darkness beyond the bars, "I believe, too, that you will live through the rest, and I am praying that it may be so."

"Who is that?" asked Foy drowsily.

"Another prisoner," answered Martin.

"A prisoner who will soon be free," murmured the voice again through the blackness, for by now night had fallen, and no light came from the hole above.

Then Foy fell into sleep or stupor, and there was silence for a long while, until they heard the bolts and bars of the door of the dungeon creaking, and the glint of a lantern appeared floating on the gloom. Several men tramped down the narrow gangway, and one of them, unlocking their cage, entered, filled the jug of water from a leather jack, and threw down some loaves of black bread and pieces of stockfish, as food is thrown to dogs. Having examined the pair of them he grunted and went away, little knowing how near he had been to death, for the heart of Martin was mad. But he let him go. Then the door of the next cell was opened, and a man said, "Come out. It is time."

"It is time and I am ready," answered the thin voice. "Good-bye, friends, God be with you."

"Good-bye, lady," answered Martin; "may you soon be with God." Then he added, by an afterthought, "What is your name? I should like to know."

"Mary," she replied, and began to sing a hymn, and so, still singing the hymn, she passed away to her death. They never saw her face, they never learned who she might be, this poor girl who was but an item among the countless victims of perhaps the most hideous tyranny that the world has ever known—one of Alva's slaughtered sixty thousand. But many years afterwards, when Foy was a rich man in a freer land, he built a church and named it Mary's kirk.

The long night wore away in silence, broken only by the groans and prayers of prisoners in dens upon the same floor, or with the solemn rhythm of hymns sung by those above, till at length the light, creeping through the dungeon lattices, told them that it was morning. At its first ray Martin awoke much refreshed, for even there his health and weariness had brought sleep to him. Foy also awoke, stiff and sore, but in his right mind and very hungry. Then Martin found the loaves and the stockfish, and they filled themselves, washing down the meal with water, after which he dressed Foy's wounds, making a poultice for them out of the crumb of the bread, and doctored his own bruises as best he could.

It must have been ten o'clock or later when again the doors were opened, and men appeared who commanded that they should follow them.

"One of us can't walk," said Martin; "still, perhaps I can manage," and, lifting Foy in his arms as though he had been a baby, he passed with the jailers out of the den, down the stair, and into the court-room. Here, seated behind a table, they found Ramiro and the little, squeaky-voiced, red-faced Inquisitor.

"Heaven above us!" said the Inquisitor, "what a great hairy ruffian; it makes me feel nervous to be in the same place with him. I beg you, Governor Ramiro, instruct your soldiers to be watching and to stab him at the first movement."

"Have no fear, noble sir," answered Ramiro, "the villain is quite unarmed."

"I daresay, I daresay, but let us get on. Now what is the charge against these people? Ah! I see, heresy like the last upon the evidence of—oh! well, never mind. Well, we will take that as proved, and, of course, it is enough. But what more? Ah! here it is. Escaped from The Hague with the goods of a heretic, killed sundry of his Majesty's lieges, blew up others on the Haarlemer Meer, and yesterday, as we know for ourselves, committed a whole series of murders in resisting lawful arrest. Prisoners, have you anything to say?"

"Plenty," answered Foy.

"Then save your trouble and my time, since nothing can excuse your godless, rebellious, and damnable behaviour. Friend Governor, into your hands I deliver them, and may God have mercy on their souls. See, by the way, that you have a priest at hand to shrive them at last, if they will be shriven, just for the sake of charity, but all the other details I leave to you. Torment? Oh! of course if you think there is anything to be gained by it, or that it will purify their souls. And now I will be going on to Haarlem, for I tell you frankly, friend Governor, that I don't think this town of Leyden safe for an honest officer of the law; there are too many bad characters here, schismatics and resisters of authority. What? The warrant not ready? Well, I will sign it in blank. You can fill it in. There. God forgive you, heretics; may your souls find peace, which is more, I fear, than your bodies will for the next few hours. Bah! friend Governor, I wish you had not made me assist

at the execution of that girl last night, especially as I understand she leaves no property worth having; her white face haunts my mind, I can't be rid of the look of those great eyes. Oh! these heretics, to what sorrow do they put us orthodox people! Farewell, friend Governor; yes, I think I will go out by the back way, some of those turbulent citizens might be waiting in front. Farewell, and temper justice with mercy if you can," and he was gone.

Presently Ramiro, who had accompanied him to the gate, returned. Seating himself on the further side of the table, he drew his rapier and laid it before him. Then, having first commanded them to bring a chair in which Foy might sit, since he could not stand because of his wounded leg, he told the guard to fall back out of hearing, but to be ready should he need them.

"Not much dignity about that fellow," he said, addressing Martin and Foy in a cheerful voice; "quite different from the kind of thing you expected, I daresay. No hooded Dominican priests, no clerks taking notes, no solemnities, nothing but a little red-faced wretch, perspiring with terror lest the mob outside should catch him, as for my part I hope they may. Well, gentlemen, what can you expect, seeing that, to my knowledge, the man is a bankrupt tailor of Antwerp? However, it is the substance we have to deal with, not the shadow, and that's real enough, for his signature on a death warrant is as good as that of the Pope, or his gracious Majesty King Philip, or, for the matter of that, of Alva himself. Therefore, you are—dead men."

"As you would have been had I not been fool enough to neglect Martin's advice out in the Haarlemer Meer and let you escape," answered Foy.

"Precisely, my young friend, but you see my guardian angel was too many for you, and you did neglect that excellent counsel. But, as it happens, it is just about the Haarlemer Meer that I want to have a word with you."

Foy and Martin looked at each other, for now they understood exactly why they were there, and Ramiro, watching them out of the corners of his eyes, went on in a low voice:

"Let us drop this and come to business. You hid it, and you know where it is, and I am in need of a competence for my old age. Now, I am not a cruel man; I wish to put no one to pain or death; moreover, I tell you frankly, I admire both of you very much. The escape with the treasure on board your boat *Swallow*, and the blowing up, were both exceedingly well managed, with but one mistake which you, young sir, have pointed out," and he bowed and smiled. "The fight that you made yesterday, too, was splendid, and I have entered the details of it in my own private diary, because they ought not to be forgotten."

Now it was Foy's turn to bow, while even on Martin's grim and impassive countenance flickered a faint smile.

"Naturally," went on Ramiro, "I wish to save such men, I wish you to go hence quite free and unharmed," and he paused.

"How can we after we have been condemned to death?" asked Foy.

"Well, it does not seem difficult. My friend, the tailor —I mean the Inquisitor—who, for all his soft words, *is* a cruel man indeed, was in a hurry to be gone, and—he signed a blank warrant, always an incautious thing to do. Well, a judge can acquit as well as condemn, and this one —is no exception. What is there to prevent me filling this paper in with an order for your release?"

"And what is there to show us that you would release us after all?" asked Foy.

"Upon the honour of a gentleman," answered Ramiro laying his hand on his heart. "Tell me what I want to know, give me a week to make certain necessary arrange-

ments, and so soon as I am back you shall both of you be freed."

"Doubtless," said Foy, angrily, "upon such honour as gentlemen learn in the galleys, Señor Ramiro—I beg your pardon, Count Juan de Montalvo."

Ramiro's face grew crimson to the hair.

"Sir," he said, "were I a different sort of man, for those words you should die in a fashion from which even the boldest might shrink. But you are young and inexperienced, so I will overlook them. Now this bargaining must come to a head. Which will you have, life and safety, or the chance—which under the circumstances is no chance at all—that one day, not you, of course, but somebody interested in it, may recover a hoard of money and jewels?"

Then Martin spoke for the first time, very slowly and respectfully.

"Worshipful sir," he said, "we cannot tell you where the money is because we do not know. To be frank with you, nobody ever knew except myself. I took the stuff and sank it in the water in a narrow channel between two islands, and I made a little drawing of them on a piece of paper."

"Exactly, my good friend, and where is that piece of paper?"

"Alas! sir, when I was lighting the fuses on board the *Swallow*, I let it fall in my haste, and it is—in exactly the same place as are all your worship's worthy comrades who were on board that ship. I believe, however, that if you will put yourself under my guidance I could show your Excellency the spot, and this, as I do not want to be killed, I should be most happy to do."

"Good, simple man," said Ramiro with a little laugh, "how charming is the prospect that you paint of a midnight row with you upon those lonely waters; the tarantula

and the butterfly arm in arm! Mynheer van Goorl, what have you to say?"

"Only that the story told by Martin here is true. I do not know where the money is, as I was not present at its sinking, and the paper has been lost."

"Indeed? I am afraid, then, that it will be necessary for me to refresh your memory, but, first, I have one more argument, or rather two. Has it struck you that another life may hang upon your answer? As a rule men are loth to send their fathers to death."

Foy heard, and terrible as was the hint, yet it came to him as a relief, for he had feared lest he was about to say "your mother" or "Elsa Brant."

"That is my first argument, a good one, I think, but I have—another which may appeal even more forcibly to a young man and prospective heir. The day before yesterday you became engaged to Elsa Brant—don't look surprised; people in my position have long ears, and you needn't be frightened, the young lady will not be brought here; she is too valuable."

"Be so good as to speak plainly," said Foy.

"With pleasure. You see this girl is the heiress, is she not? and whether or no I find out the facts from you, sooner or later, in this way or that, she will doubtless discover where her heritage is hidden. Well, that fortune a husband would have the advantage of sharing. I myself labour at present under no matrimonial engagements, and am in a position to obtain an introduction—ah! my friend, are you beginning to see that there are more ways of killing a dog than by hanging him?"

Weak and wounded as he was, Foy's heart sank in him at the words of this man, this devil who had betrayed his mother with a mock marriage, and who was the father of Adrian. The idea of making the heiress his wife was one worthy of his evil ingenuity, and why should he not put it

into practice? Elsa, of course, would rebel, but Alva's officials in such days had means of overcoming any maidenly reluctance, or at least of forcing women to choose between death and degradation. Was it not common for them even to dissolve marriages in order to give heretics to new husbands who desired their wealth? There was no justice left in the land; human beings were the chattels and slaves of their oppressors. Oh God! what was there to do, except to trust in God? Why should they be tortured, murdered, married against their wills, for the sake of a miserable pile of pelf? Why not tell the truth and let the fellow take the money? He had measured up his man, and believed that he could drive a bargain with him. Ramiro wanted money, not lives. He was no fanatic; horrors gave him no pleasure; he cared nothing about his victims' souls. As he had betrayed his mother, Lysbeth, for cash, so he would be willing to let them all go for cash. Why not make the exchange?

Then distinct, formidable, overwhelming, the answer rose up in Foy's mind. Because he had sworn to his father that nothing which could be imagined should induce him to reveal this secret and betray this trust. And not only to his father, to Hendrik Brant also, who already had given his own life to keep his treasure out of the hands of the Spaniards, believing that in some unforeseen way it would advantage his own land and countrymen. No, great as was the temptation, he must keep the letter of his bond and pay its dreadful price. So again Foy answered,

"It is useless to try to bribe me, for I do not know where the money is."

"Very well, Heer Foy van Goorl, now we have a plain issue before us, but I will still try to protect you against yourself—the warrant shall remain blank for a little while."

Then he called aloud, "Sergeant, ask the Professor Baptiste to be so good as to step this way."

CHAPTER XXI

HOW MARTIN TURNED COWARD

THE sergeant left the room and presently returned, followed by the Professor, a tall hang-dog looking rogue, clad in rusty black, with broad, horny hands, and nails bitten down to the quick.

"Good morning to you, Professor," said Ramiro. "Here are two subjects for your gentle art. You will begin upon the big one, and from time to time report progress, and be sure, if he becomes willing to reveal what I want to know—never mind what it is, that is my affair—come to summon me at once."

"What methods does your Excellency wish employed?"

"Man, I leave that to you. Am I a master of your filthy trade? Any method, provided it is effective."

"I don't like the look of him," grumbled the Professor, gnawing at his short nails. "I have heard about this mad brute; he is capable of anything."

"Then take the whole guard with you; one naked wretch can't do much against eight armed men. And, listen; take the young gentleman also, and let him see what goes on; the experience may modify his views, but don't touch him without telling me. I have reports to write, and shall stop here."

"I don't like the look of him," repeated the Professor. "I say that he makes me feel cold down the back—he has the evil eye; I'd rather begin with the young one."

"Begone and do what I tell you," said Ramiro, glaring

at him fiercely. "Guard, attend upon the executioner Baptiste."

"Bring them along," grumbled the Professor.

"No need for violence, worthy sir," muttered Martin; "show the way and we follow," and stooping down he lifted Foy from his chair.

Then the procession started. First went Baptiste and four soldiers, next came Martin bearing Foy, and after them four more soldiers. They passed out of the court-room into the passage beneath the archway. Martin, shuffling along slowly, glanced down it and saw that on the wall, among some other weapons, hung his own sword, Silence. The big doors were locked and barred, but at the wicket by the side of them stood a sentry, whose office it was to let people in and out upon their lawful business. Making pretence to shift Foy in his arms, Martin scanned this wicket as narrowly as time would allow, and observed that it seemed to be secured by means of iron bolts at the top and the bottom, but that it was not locked, since the socket into which the tongue went was empty. Doubtless, while he was on guard there, the porter did not think it necessary to go to the pains of using the great key that hung at his girdle.

The sergeant in charge of the victims opened a low and massive door, which was almost exactly opposite to that of the court-room, by shooting back a bolt and pushing it ajar. Evidently the place beyond at some time or other had been used as a prison, which accounted for the bolt on the outside. A few seconds later they were locked into the torture-chamber of the Gevangenhuis, which was nothing more than a good-sized vault like that of a cellar, lit with lamps, for no light of day was suffered to enter here, and by a horrid little fire that flickered on the floor. The furnitures of the place may be guessed at; those that are curious about such things can satisfy themselves by examining the

mediæval prisons at The Hague and elsewhere. Let us pass them over as unfit even for description, although these terrors, of which we scarcely like to speak to-day, were very familiar to the sight of our ancestors of but three centuries ago.

Martin sat Foy down upon some terrible engine that roughly resembled a chair, and once more let his blue eyes wander about him. Amongst the various implements was one leaning against the wall, not very far from the door, which excited his especial interest. It was made for a dreadful purpose, but Martin reflected only that it seemed to be a stout bar of iron exactly suited to the breaking of anybody's head.

"Come," sneered the Professor, "undress that big gentleman while I make ready his little bed."

So the soldiers stripped Martin, nor did they assault him with sneers and insults, for they remembered the man's deeds of yesterday, and admired his strength and endurance, and the huge, muscular frame beneath their hands.

"Now he is ready if you are," said the sergeant.

The Professor rubbed his hands.

"Come on, my little man," he said.

Then Martin's nerve gave way, and he began to shiver and to shake.

"Oho!" laughed the Professor, "even in this stuffy place he is cold without his clothes; well, we must warm him—we must warm him."

"Who would have thought that a big fellow, who can fight well, too, was such a coward at heart," said the sergeant of the guard to his companions. "After all, he will give no more play than a Rhine salmon."

Martin heard the words, and was seized with such an intense access of fear that he burst into a sweat all over his body.

"I can't bear it," he said, covering his eyes—which,

however, he did not shut—with his fingers. "The rack was always my nightmare, and now I see why. I'll tell all I know."

"Oh! Martin, Martin," broke out Foy in a kind of wail, "I was doing my best to keep my own courage; I never dreamt that you would turn coward."

"Every well has a bottom, master," whined Martin, "and mine is the rack. Forgive me, but I can't abide the sight of it."

Foy stared at him open-mouthed. Could he believe his ears? And if Martin was so horribly scared, why did his eye glint in that peculiar way between his fingers? He had seen this light in it before, no later indeed than the last afternoon just as the soldiers tried to rush the stair. He gave up the problem as insoluble, but from that moment he watched very narrowly.

"Do you hear what this young lady says, Professor Baptiste?" said the sergeant. "She says" (imitating Martin's whine) "that she'll tell all she knows."

"Then the great cur might have saved me this trouble. Stop here with him. I must go and inform the Governor; those are my orders. No, no, you needn't give him his clothes yet—that cloth is enough—one can never be sure."

Then he walked to the door and began to unlock it, as he went striking Martin in the face with the back of his hand, and saying,

"Take that, cur." Whereat, as Foy observed, the cowed prisoner perspired more profusely than before, and shrank away towards the wall.

God in Heaven! What had happened? The door of the torture den was opened, and suddenly, uttering the words, "*To me, Foy!*" Martin made a movement more quick than he could follow. Something flew up and fell with a fearful thud upon the executioner in the doorway.

The guard sprang forward, and a great bar of iron, hurled with awful force into their faces, swept two of them broken to the ground. Another instant, and one arm was about his middle, the next they were outside the door, Martin standing straddle-legged over the body of the dead Professor Baptiste.

They were outside the door, but it was not shut, for now, on the other side of it six men were pushing with all their might and main. Martin dropped Foy. "Take his dagger and look out for the porter," he gasped as he hurled himself against the door.

In a second Foy had drawn the weapon out of the belt of the dead man, and wheeled round. The porter from the wicket was running on them sword in hand. Foy forgot that he was wounded—for the moment his leg seemed sound again. He doubled himself up and sprang at the man like a wild-cat, as one springs who has the rack behind him. There was no fight, yet in that thrust the skill which Martin had taught him so patiently served him well, for the sword of the Spaniard passed over his head, whereas Foy's long dagger went through the porter's throat. A glance showed Foy that from him there was nothing more to fear, so he turned.

"Help if you can," groaned Martin, as well he might, for with his naked shoulder wedged against one of the cross pieces of the door he was striving to press it to so that the bolt could be shot into its socket.

Heavens! what a struggle was that. Martin's blue eyes seemed to be starting from his head, his tongue lolled out and the muscles of his body rose in great knots. Foy hopped to him and pushed as well as he was able. It was little that he could do standing upon one leg only, for now the sinews of the other had given way again; still that little made the difference, for let the soldiers on the further side strive as they might, slowly, very slowly, the thick door quivered to its frame. Martin glanced at the bolt, for he



HE SPRANG AT THE MAN LIKE A WILD CAT



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could not speak, and with his left hand Foy slowly worked it forward. It was stiff with disuse, it caught upon the edge of the socket.

"Closer," he gasped.

Martin made an effort so fierce that it was hideous to behold, for beneath the pressure the blood trickled from his nostrils, but the door went in the sixteenth of an inch and the rusty bolt creaked home into its stone notch.

Martin stepped back, and for a moment stood swaying like a man about to fall. Then, recovering himself, he leapt at the sword Silence which hung upon the wall and passed its thong over his right wrist. Next he turned towards the door of the court-room.

"Where are you going?" asked Foy.

"To bid *him* farewell," hissed Martin.

"You're mad," said Foy; "let's fly while we can. That door may give—they are shouting."

"Perhaps you are right," answered Martin doubtfully. "Come. On to my back with you."

A few seconds later the two soldiers on guard outside the Gevangenhuis were amazed to see a huge, red-bearded man, naked save for a loin-cloth, and waving a great bare sword, who carried upon his back another man, rush straight at them with a roar. They never waited his onset; they were terrified and thought that he was a devil. This way and that they sprang, and the man with his burden passed between them over the little drawbridge down the street of the city, heading for the Morsch poort.

Finding their wits, again the guards started in pursuit, but a voice from among the passers-by cried out:

"It is Martin, Red Martin, and Foy van Goorl, who escape from the Gevangenhuis," and instantly a stone flew towards the soldiers.

Then, bearing in mind the fate of their comrades on the yesterday, those men scuttled back to the friendly shelter

of the prison gate. When at length Ramiro, growing weary of waiting, came out from an inner chamber beyond the court-room, where he had been writing, to find the Professor and the porter dead in the passage, and the yelling guard locked in his own torture-chamber, why, then those sentries declared that they had seen nothing at all of prisoners clothed or naked.

For a while he believed them, and mighty was the hunt from the clock-tower of the Gevangenhuis down to the lowest stone of its cellars, yes, and even in the waters of the moat. But when the Governor found out the truth it went very ill with those soldiers, and still worse with the guard from whom Martin had escaped in the torture-room like an eel out of the hand of a fish-wife. For by this time Ramiro's temper was roused, and he began to think that after all he had done ill to return to Leyden.

But he had still a card to play. In a certain room in the Gevangenhuis sat another victim. Compared to the dreadful dens where Foy and Martin had been confined this was quite a pleasant chamber upon the first floor, being reserved, indeed, for political prisoners of rank, or officers captured upon the field who were held to ransom. Thus it had a real window, secured, however, by a double set of iron bars, which overlooked the little inner courtyard and the gaol kitchen. Also it was furnished after a fashion, and was more or less clean. This prisoner was none other than Dirk van Goorl, who had been neatly captured as he returned towards his house after making certain arrangements for the flight of his family, and hurried away to the gaol. On that morning Dirk also had been put upon his trial before the squeaky-voiced and agitated ex-tailor. He also had been condemned to death, the method of his end, as in the case of Foy and Martin, being left in the hands of the Governor. Then they led him back to his room, and shot the bolts upon him there.

Some hours later a man entered his cell, to the door of which he was escorted by soldiers, bringing him food and drink. He was one of the cooks and, as it chanced, a talkative fellow.

"What passes in the prison, friend?" asked Dirk looking up, "that I see people running to and fro across the courtyard, and hear trampling and shouts in the passages? Is the Prince of Orange coming, perchance, to set all of us poor prisoners free?" and he smiled sadly.

"Umph!" grunted the man, "we have prisoners here who set themselves free without waiting for any Prince of Orange. Magicians they must be—magicians and nothing less."

Dirk's interest was excited. Putting his hand into his pocket he drew out a gold piece, which he gave to the man.

"Friend," he said, "you cook my food, do you not, and look after me? Well, I have a few of these about me, and if you prove kind they may as well find their way into your pocket as into those of your betters. Do you understand?"

The man nodded, took the money, and thanked him.

"Now," went on Dirk, "while you clean the room, tell me about this escape, for small things amuse those who hear no tidings."

"Well, Mynheer," answered the man, "this is the tale of it so far as I can gather. Yesterday they captured two fellows, heretics, I suppose, who made a good fight and did them much damage in a warehouse. I don't know their names, for I am a stranger to this town, but I saw them brought in; a young fellow, who seemed to be wounded in the leg and neck, and a great red-bearded giant of a man. They were put upon their trial this morning, and afterwards sent across, the two of them together, with eight men to guard them, to call upon the Professor—you understand?"

Dirk nodded, for this Professor was well known in Leyden. "And then?" he asked.

"And then? Why, Mother in Heaven! they came out, that's all—the big man stripped and carrying the other on his back. Yes, they killed the Professor with the branding iron, and out they came—like ripe peas from a pod."

"Impossible!" said Dirk.

"Very well, perhaps you know better than I do; perhaps it is impossible also that they should have pushed the door to, let all those Spanish cocks inside do what they might, and bolted them in; perhaps it is impossible that they should have spitted the porter and got clean away through the outside guards, the big one still carrying the other upon his back. Perhaps all these things are impossible, but they're true nevertheless, and if you don't believe me, after they get away from the whipping-post, just ask the bridge guard why they ran so fast when they saw that great, naked, blue-eyed fellow come at them roaring like a lion, with his big sword flashing above his head. Oh! there's a pretty to-do, I can tell you, a pretty to-do, and in meal or malt we shall all pay the price of it, from the Governor down. Indeed, some backs are paying it now."

"But, friend, were they not taken outside the gaol?"

"Taken? Who was to take them when the rascally mob made them an escort five hundred strong as they went down the street? No, they are far away from Leyden now, you may swear to that. I must be going, but if there is anything you'd like while you're here just tell me, and as you are so liberal I'll try and see that you get what you want."

As the bolts were shot home behind the man Dirk clasped his hands and almost laughed aloud with joy. So Martin was free and Foy was free, and until they could be taken again the secret of the treasure remained safe. Montalvo would never have it, of that he was sure. And as for his own fate? Well, he cared little about it, especially as the Inquisitor had decreed that, being a man of so much

importance, he was not to be put to the "question." This order, however, was prompted, not by mercy, but by discretion, since the fellow knew that, like other of the Holland towns, Leyden was on the verge of open revolt, and feared lest, should it leak out that one of the wealthiest and most respected of its burghers was actually being tormented for his faith's sake, the populace might step over the boundary line.

When Adrian had seen the wounded Spanish soldiers and their bearers torn to pieces by the rabble, and had heard the great door of the Gevangenhuis close upon Foy and Martin, he turned to go home with his evil news. But for a long while the mob would not go home, and had it not been that the drawbridge over the moat in front of the prison was up, and that they had no means of crossing it, probably they would have attacked the building then and there. Presently, however, rain began to fall and they melted away, wondering, not too happily, whether, in that time of daily slaughter, the Duke of Alva would think a few common soldiers worth while making a stir about.

Adrian entered the upper room to tell his tidings, since they must be told, and found it occupied by his mother alone. She was sitting straight upright in her chair, her hands resting upon her knees, staring out of the window with a face like marble.

"I cannot find him," he began, "but Foy and Martin are taken after a great fight in which Foy was wounded. They are in the Gevangenhuis."

"I know all," interrupted Lysbeth in a cold, heavy voice. "My husband is taken also. Someone must have betrayed them. May God reward him! Leave me, Adrian."

Then Adrian turned and crept away to his own chamber, his heart so full of remorse and shame that at times he

thought that it must burst. Weak as he was, wicked as he was, he had never intended this, but now, oh Heaven! his brother Foy and the man who had been his benefactor, whom his mother loved more than her life, were through him given over to a death worse than the mind could conceive. Somehow that night wore away, and of this we may be sure, that it did not go half as heavily with the victims in their dungeon as with the betrayer in his free comfort. Thrice during its dark hours, indeed, Adrian was on the point of destroying himself; once even he set the hilt of his sword upon the floor and its edge against his breast, and then at the prick of steel shrank back.

Better would it have been for him, perhaps, could he have kept his courage; at least he would have been spared much added shame and misery.

So soon as Adrian had left her Lysbeth rose, robed herself, and took her way to the house of her cousin, van de Werff, now a successful citizen of middle age and the burgomaster-elect of Leyden.

"You have heard the news?" she said.

"Alas! cousin, I have," he answered, "and it is very terrible. Is it true that this treasure of Hendrik Brant's is at the bottom of it all?"

She nodded, and answered, "I believe so."

"Then could they not bargain for their lives by surrendering its secret?"

"Perhaps. That is, Foy and Martin might—Dirk does not know its whereabouts—he refused to know, but they have sworn that they will die first."

"Why, cousin?"

"Because they promised as much to Hendrik Brant, who believed that if his gold could be kept from the Spaniards it would do some mighty service to his country in time to come, and who has persuaded them all that is so."

"Then God grant it may be true," said van de Werff with a sigh, "for otherwise it is sad to think that more lives should be sacrificed for the sake of a heap of pelf."

"I know it, cousin, but I come to you to save those lives."

"How?"

"How?" she answered fiercely. "Why, by raising the town; by attacking the Gevangenhuis and rescuing them; by driving the Spaniards out of Leyden——"

"And thereby bringing upon ourselves the fate of Mons. Would you see this place also given over to sack by the soldiers of Noircarmes and Don Frederic?"

"I care not what I see so long as I save my son and my husband," she answered desperately.

"There speaks the woman, not the patriot. It is better that three men should die than a whole city full."

"That is a strange argument to find in your mouth, cousin, the argument of Caiaphas the Jew."

"Nay, Lysbeth, be not wroth with me, for what can I say? The Spanish troops in Leyden are not many, it is true, but more have been sent for from Haarlem and elsewhere after the troubles of yesterday arising out of the capture of Foy and Martin, and in forty-eight hours at the longest they will be here. This town is not provisioned for a siege, its citizens are not trained to arms, and we have little powder stored. Moreover, the city council is divided. For the killing of the Spanish soldiers we may compound, but if we attack the Gevangenhuis, that is open rebellion, and we shall bring the army of Don Frederic down upon us."

"What matter, cousin? It will come sooner or later."

"Then let it come later, when we are more prepared to beat it off. Oh! do not reproach me, for I can bear it ill, I who am working day and night to make ready for the hour of trial. I love your husband and your son, my heart bleeds for your sorrow and their doom, but at present I can

do nothing, nothing. You must bear your burden, they must bear theirs, I must bear mine; we must all wander through the night not knowing where we wander till God causes the dawn to break, the dawn of freedom and retribution."

Lysbeth made no answer, only she rose and stumbled from the house, while van de Werff sat down groaning bitterly and praying for help and light.

CHAPTER XXII

A MEETING AND A PARTING

LYSBETH did not sleep that night, for even if her misery would have let her sleep, she could not because of the physical fire that burnt in her veins, and the strange pangs of agony which pierced her head. At first she thought little of them, but when at last the cold light of the autumn morning dawned she went to a mirror and examined herself, and there upon her neck she found a hard red swelling of the size of a nut. Then Lysbeth knew that she had caught the plague from the Vrouw Jansen, and laughed aloud, a dreary little laugh, since if all she loved were to die, it seemed to her good that she should die also. Elsa was abed prostrated with grief, and, shutting herself in her room, Lysbeth suffered none to come near her except one woman whom she knew had recovered from the plague in past years, but even to her she said nothing of her sickness.

About eleven o'clock in the morning this woman rushed into her chamber crying, "They have escaped! They have escaped!"

"Who?" gasped Lysbeth, springing from her chair.

"Your son Foy and Red Martin," and she told the tale of how the naked man with the naked sword, carrying the wounded Foy upon his back, burst his way roaring from the Gevangenhuis, and, protected by the people, had run through the town and out of the Morsch poort, heading for the Haarlemer Meer.

As she listened Lysbeth's eyes flamed up with a fire of pride.

"Oh! good and faithful servant," she murmured, "you have saved my son, but, alas! your master you could not save."

Another hour passed, and the woman appeared again bearing a letter.

"Who brought this?" she asked.

"A Spanish soldier, mistress."

Then she cut the silk and read it. It was unsigned, and ran:—

"One in authority sends greetings to the Vrouw van Goorl. If the Vrouw van Goorl would save the life of the man who is dearest to her, she is prayed to veil herself and follow the bearer of this letter. For her own safety she need have no fear; it is assured hereby."

Lysbeth thought awhile. This might be a trick; very probably it was a trick to take her. Well, if so, what did it matter since she would rather die with her husband than live on without him; moreover, why should she turn aside from death, she in whose veins the plague was burning? But there was another thing worse than that. She could guess who had penned this letter; it even seemed to her, after all these many years, that she recognised the writing, disguised though it was. Could she face him! Well, why not—for Dirk's sake?

And if she refused and Dirk was done to death, would she not reproach herself, if she lived to remember it, because she had left a stone unturned?

"Give me my cloak and veil," she said to the woman, "and now go tell the man that I am coming."

At the door she found the soldier, who saluted her, and said respectfully, "Follow me, lady, but at a little distance."

So they started, and through side streets Lysbeth was led to a back entrance of the Gevangenhuis, which opened and closed behind her mysteriously, leaving her wondering

whether she would ever pass that gate again. Within a man was waiting—she did not even notice what kind of man—who also said, "Follow me, lady," and led her through gloomy passages and various doors into a little empty chamber furnished with a table and two chairs. Presently the door opened and shut; then her whole being shrank and sickened as though beneath the breath of poison, for there before her, still the same, still handsome, although so marred by time and scars and evil, stood the man who had been her husband, Juan de Montalvo. But whatever she felt Lysbeth showed nothing of it in her face, which remained white and stern; moreover, even before she looked at him she was aware that he feared her more than she feared him.

It was true, for from this woman's eyes went out a sword of terror that seemed to pierce Montalvo's heart. Back flew his mind to the scene of their betrothal, and the awful words that she had spoken then re-echoed in his ears. How strangely things had come round, for on that day, as on this, the stake at issue was the life of Dirk van Goorl. In the old times she had bought it, paying as its price herself, her fortune, and, worst of all, to a woman, her lover's scorn and wonder. What would she be prepared to pay now? Well, fortunately, he need ask but little of her. And yet his soul mistrusted him of these bargainings with Lysbeth van Hout for the life of Dirk van Goorl. The first had ended ill with a sentence of fourteen years in the galleys, most of which he had served. How would the second end?

By way of answer there seemed to rise before the eye of Montalvo's mind a measureless black gulf, and, falling, falling, falling through its infinite depths one miserable figure, a mere tiny point that served to show the vastness it explored. The point turned over, and he saw its face as in a crystal—it was his own.

This unpleasant nightmare of the imagination came in an instant, and in an instant passed. The next Montalvo, courteous and composed, was bowing before his visitor and praying her to be seated.

"It is most good of you, Vrouw van Goorl," he began, "to have responded so promptly to my invitation."

"Perhaps, Count de Montalvo," she replied, "you will do me the favour to set out your business in as few words as possible."

"Most certainly; that is my desire. Let me free your mind of apprehension. The past has mingled memories for both of us, some of them bitter, some, let me hope, sweet," and he laid his hand upon his heart and sighed. "But it is a dead past, so, dear lady, let us agree to bury it in a fitting silence."

Lysbeth made no answer, only her mouth grew a trifle more stern.

"Now, one word more, and I will come to the point. Let me congratulate you upon the gallant deeds of a gallant son. Of course his courage and dexterity, with that of the red giant, Martin, have told against myself, have, in short, lost me a trick in the game. But I am an old soldier, and I can assure you that the details of their fight yesterday at the factory, and of their marvellous escape from—from—well, painful surroundings this morning, have stirred my blood and made my heart beat fast."

"I have heard the tale; do not trouble to repeat it," said Lysbeth. "It is only what I expected of them, but I thank God that it has pleased Him to let them live on so that in due course they may fearfully avenge a beloved father and master."

Montalvo coughed and turned his head with the idea of avoiding that ghastly nightmare of a pitiful little man falling down a fathomless gulf which had sprung up suddenly in his mind again.

"Well," he went on, "a truce to compliments. They escaped, and I am glad of it, whatever murders they may contemplate in the future. Yes, notwithstanding their great crimes and manslayings in the past I am glad that they escaped, although it was my duty to keep them while I could—and if I should catch them it will be my duty—but I needn't talk of that to you. Of course, however, you know there is one gentleman who was not quite so fortunate."

"My husband?"

"Yes, your worthy husband, who, happily for my reputation as captain of one of His Majesty's prisons, occupies an upstairs room."

"What of him?" asked Lysbeth.

"Dear lady, don't be over anxious; there is nothing so wearing as anxiety. I was coming to the matter." Then, with a sudden change of manner, he added, "It is needful, Lysbeth, that I should set out the situation."

"What situation do you mean?"

"Well, principally that of the treasure."

"What treasure?"

"Oh! woman, do not waste time in trying to fool me. The treasure, the vast, the incalculable treasure of Hendrik Brant which Foy van Goorl and Martin, who have escaped"—and he ground his teeth together at the anguish of the thought—"disposed of somewhere in the Haarlemer Meer."

"Well, what about this treasure?"

"I want it, that is all."

"Then you had best go to seek it."

"That is my intention, and I shall begin to search—in the heart of Dirk van Goorl," he added, slowly crushing the handkerchief he held with his long fingers as though it were a living thing that could be choked to death.

Lysbeth never stirred, she had expected this.

"You will find it a poor mine to dig in," she said, "for he knows nothing of the whereabouts of this money. Nobody knows anything of it now. Martin hid it, as I understand, and lost the paper, so it will lie there till the Haarlemer Meer is drained."

"Dear me! Do you know I have heard that story before; yes, from the excellent Martin himself—and, do you know, I don't quite believe it."

"I cannot help what you believe or do not believe. You may remember that it was always my habit to speak the truth."

"Quite so, but others may be less conscientious. See here," and drawing a paper from his doublet, he held it before her. It was nothing less than the death-warrant of Dirk van Goorl, signed by the Inquisitor, duly authorised thereto.

Mechanically she read it and understood.

"You will observe," he went on, "that the method of the criminal's execution is left to the good wisdom of our well-beloved—etc., in plain language, to me. Now might I trouble you so far as to look out of this little window? What do you see in front of you? A kitchen? Quite so; always a homely and pleasant sight in the eyes of an excellent housewife like yourself. And—do you mind bending forward a little? What do you see up there? A small barred window? Well, let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that a hungry man, a man who grows hungrier and hungrier, sat behind that window watching the cooks at their work and seeing the meat carried into this kitchen, to come out an hour or two later as hot, steaming, savoury joints, while he wasted, wasted, wasted, and starved, starved, starved. Don't you think, my dear lady, that this would be a very unpleasant experience for that man?"

"Are you a devil?" gasped Lysbeth, springing back.

"I have never regarded myself as such, but if you seek

a definition, I should say that I am a hard-working, necessitous, and somewhat unfortunate gentleman who has been driven to rough methods in order to secure a comfortable old age. I can assure you that *I* do not wish to starve anybody; I wish only to find Hendrik Brant's treasure, and if your worthy husband won't tell me where it is, why I must make him, that is all. In six or eight days under my treatment I am convinced that he will become quite fluent on the subject, for there is nothing that should cause a fat burgher, accustomed to good living, to open his heart more than a total lack of the victuals which he can see and smell. Did you ever hear the story of an ancient gentleman called Tantalus? These old fables have a wonderful way of adapting themselves to the needs and circumstances of us moderns, haven't they?"

Then Lysbeth's pride broke down, and, in the abandonment of her despair, flinging herself upon her knees before this monster, she begged for her husband's life, begged, in the name of God, yes, and even in the name of Montalvo's son, Adrian. So low had her misery brought her that she pleaded with the man by the son of shame whom she had borne to him.

He prayed her to rise. "I want to save your husband's life," he said. "I give you my word that if only he will tell me what I desire to know, I will save it; yes, although the risk is great, I will even manage his escape, and I shall ask you to go upstairs presently and explain my amiable intentions to him." Then he thought a moment and added, "But you mentioned one Adrian. Pray do you mean the gentleman whose signature appears here?" and he handed her another document, saying, "Read it quietly, there is no hurry. The good Dirk is not starving yet; I am informed, indeed, that he has just made an excellent breakfast—not his last by many thousands, let us hope."

Lysbeth took the sheets and glanced at them. Then her

intelligence awoke, and she read on fiercely until her eye came to the well-known signature at the foot of the last page. She cast the roll down with a cry as though a serpent had sprung from its pages and bitten her.

"I fear that you are pained," said Montalvo sympathetically, "and no wonder, for myself I have gone through such disillusionments, and know how they wound a generous nature. That's why I showed you this document, because I also am generous and wish to warn you against this young gentleman, who, I understand, you allege is my son. You see the person who would betray his brother might even go a step further and betray his mother, so, if you take my advice, you will keep an eye upon the young man. Also I am bound to remind you that it is more or less your own fault. It is a most unlucky thing to curse a child before it is born—you remember the incident? That curse has come home to roost with a vengeance. What a warning against giving way to the passion of the moment!"

Lysbeth heeded him no longer; she was thinking as she had never thought before. At that moment, as though by an inspiration, there floated into her mind the words of the dead Vrouw Jansen: "The plague, I wish that I had caught it before, for then I would have taken it to him in prison, and they couldn't have treated him as they did." Dirk was in prison, and Dirk was to be starved to death, for, whatever Montalvo might think, he did not know the secret, and, therefore, could not tell it. And she—she had the plague on her; she knew its symptoms well, and its poison was burning in her every vein, although she still could think and speak and walk.

Well, why not? It would be no crime. Indeed, if it was a crime, she cared little; it would be better that he should die of the plague in five days, or perhaps in two, if it worked quickly, as it often did with the full-blooded,

than that he should linger on starving for twelve or more, and perhaps be tormented besides.

Swiftly, very swiftly, Lysbeth came to her dreadful decision. Then she spoke in a hoarse voice.

"What do you wish me to do?"

"I wish you to reason with your husband, and to persuade him to cease from his obstinacy, and to surrender to me the secret of the hiding-place of Brant's hoard. In that event, so soon as I have proved the truth of what he tells me, I undertake that he shall be set at liberty unharmed, and that, meanwhile, he shall be well treated."

"And if I will not, or he will not, or cannot?"

"Then I have told you the alternative, and to show you that I am not joking, I will now write and sign the order. Then, if you decline this mission, or if it is fruitless, I will hand it to the officer before your eyes—and within the next ten days or so let you know the results, or witness them if you wish."

"I will go," she said, "but I must see him alone."

"It is unusual," he answered, "but provided you satisfy me that you carry no weapon, I do not know that I need object."

So, when Montalvo had written his order and scattered dust on it from the pounce-box, for he was a man of neat and methodical habits, he himself with every possible courtesy conducted Lysbeth to her husband's prison. Having ushered her into it, with a cheerful "Friend van Goorl, I bring you a visitor," he locked the door upon them, and patiently waited outside.

It matters not what passed within. Whether Lysbeth told her husband of her dread yet sacred purpose, or did not tell him; whether he ever learned of the perfidy of Adrian, or did not learn it; what were their parting words —their parting prayers, all these things matter not; indeed, the last are too holy to be written. Let us bow our heads

and pass them by in silence, and let the reader imagine them as he will.

Growing impatient at length, Montalvo unlocked the prison door and opened it, to discover Lysbeth and her husband kneeling side by side in the centre of the room like the figures on some ancient marble monument. They heard him and rose. Then Dirk folded his wife in his arms in a long, last embrace, and, loosing her, held one hand above her head in blessing, as with the other he pointed to the door.

So infinitely pathetic was this dumb show of farewell, for no word passed between them while he was present, that not only his barbed gibes, but the questions that he meant to ask, died upon the lips of Montalvo. Try as he might he could not speak them here.

"Come," he said, and Lysbeth passed out.

At the door she turned to look, and there, in the centre of the room, still stood her husband, tears streaming from his eyes, down a face radiant with an unearthly smile, and his right hand lifted towards the heavens. And so she left him.

Presently Montalvo and Lysbeth were together again in the little room.

"I fear," he said, "from what I saw just now, that your mission has failed."

"It has failed," she answered in such a voice as might be dragged by an evil magic from the lips of a corpse. "He does not know the secret you seek, and, therefore, he cannot tell it."

"I am sorry that I cannot believe you," said Montalvo, "so"—and he stretched his hand towards a bell upon the table.

"Stop," she said; "for your own sake stop. Man, will



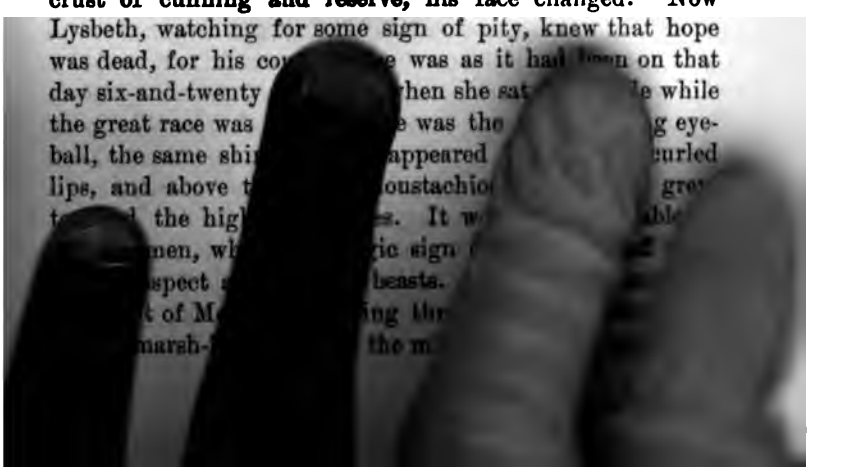
A LONG, LAST EMBRACE



you really commit this awful, this useless crime? Think of the reckoning that must be paid here and hereafter; think of me, the woman you dishonoured, standing before the Judgment Seat of God, and bearing witness against your naked, shivering soul. Think of him, the good and harmless man whom you are about cruelly to butcher, crying in the ear of Christ, 'Look upon Juan de Montalvo, my pitiless murderer——'"

"Silence," shouted Montalvo, yet shrinking back against the wall as though to avoid a sword-thrust. "Silence, you ill-omened witch, with your talk of God and judgment. It is too late, I tell you, it is too late; my hands are too red with blood, my heart is too black with sin, upon the tablets of my mind is written too long a record. What more can this one crime matter, and—do you understand?—I must have money, money to buy my pleasures, money to make my last years happy, and my deathbed soft. I have suffered enough, I have toiled enough, and I will win wealth and peace who am now once more a beggar. Yes, had you twenty husbands, I would crush the life out of all of them inch by inch to win the gold that I desire."

As he spoke and the passions in him broke through their crust of cunning and reserve, his face changed. Now Lysbeth, watching for some sign of pity, knew that hope was dead, for his co[illegible] was as it had [illegible] on that day six-and-twenty [illegible] hen she sat [illegible] while the great race was [illegible] was tho [illegible] eye-ball, the same shi[illegible] appeared [illegible] curled lips, and above t[illegible] oustachio[illegible] gre[illegible] t[illegible] the hig[illegible]. It w[illegible] able men, wh[illegible] ic sign [illegible] spect [illegible] beasts. [illegible] of M[illegible] ing thr[illegible] marsh-[illegible] the m[illegible]



God had forgotten, a thing that had burst the kindly mould of its humanity, and wrapt itself in the robe and mask of such a wolf as might raven about the cliffs of hell. Only there was fear on the face of the wolf, that inhuman face which, this side of the grave, she was yet destined to see once more.

The fit passed, and Montalvo sank down gasping, while even in her woe and agony Lysbeth shuddered at this naked vision of a Satan-haunted soul.

"I have one more thing to ask," she said. "Since my husband must die, suffer that I die with him. Will you refuse this also, and cause the cup of your crimes to flow over, and the last angel of God's mercy to flee away?"

"Yes," he answered. "You, woman with the evil eye, do you suppose that I wish you here to bring all the ills you prate of upon my head? I say that I am afraid of you. Why, for your sake, once, years ago, I made a vow to the Blessed Virgin that, whatever I worked on men, I would never again lift a hand against a woman. To that oath I look to help me at the last, for I have kept it sacredly, and am keeping it now, else by this time both you and the girl, Elsa, might have been stretched upon the rack. No, Lysbeth, get you gone, and take your curses with you," and he snatched and rang the bell.

A soldier entered the room, saluted, and asked his commands.

"Take this order," he said, "to the officer in charge of the heretic, Dirk van Goorl; it details the method of his execution. Let it be strictly adhered to, and report made to me each morning of the condition of the prisoner. Stay, show this lady from the prison."

The man saluted again and went out of the door. After him followed Lysbeth. She spoke no more, but as she passed she looked at Montalvo, and he knew well that though she might be gone, yet her curse remained behind.

The plague was on her, the plague was on her, her head and bones were racked with pain, and the swords of sorrow pierced her poor heart. But Lysbeth's mind was still clear, and her limbs still supported her. She reached her home and walked upstairs to the sitting room, commanding the servant to find the Heer Adrian and bid him join her there.

In the room was Elsa, who ran to her crying,

"Is it true? Is it true?"

"It is true, daughter, that Foy and Martin have escaped——"

"Oh! God is good!" wept the girl.

"And that my husband is a prisoner and condemned to death."

"Ah!" gasped Elsa, "I am selfish."

"It is natural that a woman should think first of the man she loves. No, do not come near me; I fear that I am stricken with the pest."

"I am not afraid of that," answered Elsa. "Did I never tell you? As a child I had it in The Hague."

"That, at least, is good news among much that is very ill; but be silent, here comes Adrian, to whom I wish to speak. Nay, you need not leave us; it is best that you should learn the truth."

Presently Adrian entered, and Elsa, watching everything, noticed that he looked sadly changed and ill.

"You sent for me, mother," he began, with some attempt at his old pompous air. Then he caught sight of her face and was silent.

"I have been to the Gevangenhuis, Adrian," she said, "and I have news to tell you. As you may have heard, your brother Foy and our servant Martin have escaped, I know not whither. They escaped out of the very jaws of worse than death, out of the torture-chamber, indeed, by killing that wretch who was known as the Professor, and

the warden of the gate, Martin carrying Foy, who is wounded, upon his back."

"I am indeed rejoiced," cried Adrian excitedly.

"Hypocrite, be silent," hissed his mother, and he knew that the worst had overtaken him.

"My husband, your stepfather, has not escaped; he is in the prison still, for there I have just bidden him farewell, and the sentence upon him is that he shall be starved to death in a cell overlooking the kitchen."

"Oh! oh!" cried Elsa, and Adrian groaned.

"It was my good, or my evil, fortune," went on Lysbeth, in a voice of ice, "to see the written evidence upon which my husband, your brother Foy, and Martin were condemned to death, on the grounds of heresy, rebellion, and the killing of the king's servants. At the foot of it, duly witnessed, stands the signature of—Adrian van Goorl."

Elsa's jaw fell. She stared at the traitor like one paralysed, while Adrian, seizing the back of a chair, rested upon it, and rocked his body to and fro.

"Have you anything to say?" asked Lysbeth.

There was still one chance for the wretched man—had he been more dishonest than he was. He might have denied all knowledge of the signature. But to do this never occurred to him. Instead, he plunged into a wandering, scarcely intelligible, explanation, for even in his dreadful plight his vanity would not permit him to tell all the truth before Elsa. Moreover, in that fearful silence, soon he became utterly bewildered, till at length he hardly knew what he was saying, and in the end came to a full stop.

"I understand you to admit that you signed this paper in the house of Hague Simon, and in the presence of a man called Ramiro, he who is Governor of the prison, and who showed it to me," said Lysbeth, lifting her head which had sunk upon her breast.

"Yes, mother, I signed something, but——"

"I wish to hear no more," interrupted Lysbeth. "Whether your motive was jealousy, or greed, or wickedness of heart, or fear, you signed that which, had you been a man, you would have suffered yourself to be torn to pieces with redhot pincers before you put a pen to it. Moreover, you gave your evidence fully and freely, for I have read it, and supported it with the severed finger of the woman Meg which you stole from Foy's room. You are the murderer of your benefactor and of your mother's heart, and the would-be murderer of your brother and of Martin Roos. When you were born, the mad wife, Martha, who nursed me, counselled that you should be put to death, lest you should live to bring evil upon me and mine. I refused, and you have brought the evil upon us all, but most, I think, upon your own soul. I do not curse you, I call down no ill upon you; Adrian, I give you over into the hands of God to deal with as He sees fit. Here is money" —and, going to her desk, she took from it a heavy purse of gold which had been prepared for their flight, and thrust it into the pocket of his doublet, wiping her fingers upon her kerchief after she had touched him. "Go hence and never let me see your face again. You were born of my body, you are my flesh and blood, but for this world and the next I renounce you, Adrian. Bastard, I know you not. Murderer, get you gone."

Adrian fell upon the ground; he grovelled before his mother trying to kiss the hem of her dress, while Elsa sobbed aloud hysterically. But Lysbeth spurned him in the face with her foot, saying,

"Get you gone before I call up such servants as are left to me to thrust you to the street."

Then Adrian rose and with great gasps of agony, like some sore-wounded thing, crept from that awful and majestic presence of outraged motherhood, crept down the stairs and away into the city.

When he had gone Lysbeth took pen and paper and wrote in large letters these words:—

"Notice to all the good citizens of Leyden. Adrian, called van Goorl, upon whose written evidence his step-father, Dirk van Goorl, his half-brother, Foy van Goorl, and the serving-man, Martin Roos, have been condemned to death in the Gevangenhuis by torment, starvation, water, fire, and sword, is known here no longer. Lysbeth van Goorl."

Then she called a servant and gave orders that this paper should be nailed upon the front door of the house where every passer-by might read it.

"It is done," she said. "Cease weeping, Elsa, and lead me to my bed, whence I pray God that I may never rise again."

Two days went by, and a fugitive rode into the city, a worn and wounded man of Leyden, with horror stamped upon his face.

"What news?" cried the people in the market-place, recognising him.

"Mechlin! Mechlin!" he gasped. "I come from Mechlin."

"What of Mechlin and its citizens?" asked Pieter van de Werff, stepping forward.

"Don Frederic has taken it; the Spaniards have butchered them; everyone, old and young, men, women, and children, they are all butchered. I escaped, but for two leagues and more I heard the sound of the death-wail of Mechlin. Give me wine."

They gave him wine, and by slow degrees, in broken sentences, he told the tale of one of the most awful crimes that ever was committed in the name of Christ by cruel man against God and his own fellows. It is written large in *history*; we need not repeat it here.

Then, when they knew the truth, up from that multitude of the men of Leyden went a roar of wrath, and a cry to vengeance for their slaughtered kin. They took arms, each what he had, the burgher his sword, the fisherman his fish-spear, the boor his ox-goad or his pick; leaders sprang up to command them, and there arose a shout of "To the gates! To the Gevangenhuis! Free the prisoners!"

They surged round the hateful place, thousands of them. The drawbridge was up, but they bridged the moat. Some shots were fired at them, then the defence ceased. They battered in the massive doors, and, when these fell, rushed to the dens and loosed those who remained alive within them.

But they found no Spaniards, for by now Ramiro and his garrison had vanished away, whither they knew not. A voice cried, "Dirk van Goorl, seek for Dirk van Goorl," and they came to the chamber overlooking the courtyard, shouting, "Van Goorl, we are here!"

They broke in the door, and there they found him, lying upon his pallet, his hands clasped, his face upturned, smitten suddenly dead, not by man, but by the poison of the plague.

Unfed and untended, the end had overtaken him very swiftly.





Book the Third

THE HARVESTING



Book the Third

THE HARVESTING

CHAPTER XXIII

FATHER AND SON

When Adrian left his mother's house in the Bree Straat he wandered away at hazard, for so utterly miserable was he that he could form no plans as to what he was to do or whither he should go. Presently he found himself at the foot of that great mound which in Leyden is still known as the Burg, a strange place with a circular wall upon the top of it, said to have been constructed by the Romans. Up this mound he climbed, and throwing himself upon the grass under an oak which grew in one of the little recesses of those ancient walls, he buried his face in his hands and tried to think.

Think! How could he think? Whenever he shut his eyes there arose before them a vision of his mother's face, a face so fearful in its awesome and unnatural calm that vaguely he wondered how he, the outcast son, upon whom it had been turned like the stare of the Medusa's head, withering his very soul, could have seen it and still live. Why did he live? Why was he not dead, he who had a sword at his side? Was it because of his innocence? He was not guilty of this dreadful crime. He had never intended to hand over Dirk van Goorl and Foy and Martin to the Inquisition. He had only talked about them to a man whom he believed to be a professor of judicial astrol-

ogy, and who said that he could compound draughts which would bend the wills of women. Could he help it if this fellow was really an officer of the Blood Council? Of course not. But, oh! why had he talked so much? Oh! why had he signed that paper, why did he not let them kill him first? He had signed, and explain as he would, he could never look an honest man in the face again, and less still a woman, if she knew the truth. So he was not still alive because he was innocent, since for all the good that this very doubtful innocence of his was likely to be even to his own conscience, he might almost as well have been guilty. Nor was he alive because he feared to die. He did fear to die horribly, but to the young and impressionable, at any rate, there are situations in which death seems the lesser of two evils. That situation had been well-nigh reached by him last night when he set the hilt of his sword against the floor and shrank back at the prick of its point. To-day it was overpast.

No, he lived on because before he died he had a hate to satisfy, a revenge to work. He would kill this dog, Ramiro, who had tricked him with his crystal gazing and his talk of friendship, who had frightened him with the threat of death until he became like some poor girl and for fear signed away his honour—oh, Heaven! for very fear, he who prided himself upon his noble Spanish blood, the blood of warriors—this treacherous dog, who, having used him, had not hesitated to betray his shame to her from whom most of all it should have been hidden, and, for aught he knew, to the others also. Yes, if ever he met him—his own brother—Foy would spit upon him in the street; Foy, who was so hatefully open and honest, who could not understand into what degradation a man's nerves may drag him. And Martin, who had always mistrusted and despised him, why, if he found the chance, he would tear him limb from limb as a kite tears a partridge. And, worse still, Dirk

van Goorl, the man who had befriended him, who had bred him up although he was no son of his, but the child of some rival, he would sit there in his prison cell, and while his face fell in and his bones grew daily plainer, till at length his portly presence was as that of a living skeleton, he would sit there by the window, watching the dishes of savoury food pass in and out beneath him, and between the pangs of his long-drawn, hideous agony, put up his prayer to God to pay back to him, Adrian, all the woe that he had caused.

Oh! it was too much. Under the crushing weight of his suffering, his senses left him, and he found such peace as to-day is won by those who are about to pass beneath the surgeon's knife; the peace that but too often wakes to a livelier agony.

When Adrian came to himself again, he felt cold, for already the autumn evening had begun to fall, and there was a feel in the clear, still air as of approaching frost. Also he was hungry (Dirk van Goorl, too, must be growing hungry now, he remembered), for he had eaten nothing since the yesterday. He would go into the town, get food, and then make up his mind what he should do.

Accordingly, descending from the Burg, Adrian went to the best inn in Leyden, and, seating himself at a table under the trees that grew outside of it, bade the waiting-man bring him food and beer. Unconsciously, for he was thinking of other things, in speaking to him, Adrian had assumed the haughty, Spanish hidalgo manner that was customary with him when addressing his inferiors. Even then he noticed, with the indignation of one who dwells upon his dignity, that this server made him no bow, but merely called his order to someone in the house, and, turning his back upon him, began to speak to a man who was loitering near. Soon Adrian became aware that he was the subject of that conversation, for the two of them looked at him out of the corners of their eyes, and jerked their thumbs

towards him. Moreover, first one, then two, then quite a number of passers-by stopped and joined in the conversation, which appeared to interest them very much. Boys came also, a dozen or more of them, and women of the fish-wife stamp, and all of these looked at him out of the corners of *their* eyes, and from time to time jerked *their* thumbs towards him. Adrian began to feel uneasy and angered, but, drawing down his bonnet, and folding his arms upon his breast, he took no notice. Presently the server thrust his meal and flagon of beer before him with such clattering clumsiness that some of the liquor splashed over upon the table.

"Be more careful, and wipe that up," said Adrian.

"Wipe it yourself," answered the man, rudely turning upon his heel.

Now Adrian was minded to be gone, but he was hungry and thirsty, so first, thought he, he would satisfy himself. Accordingly he lifted the tankard and took a long pull at it, when suddenly something struck the bottom of the vessel, jerking liquor over his face and doublet. He set it down with an oath, and laying his hand upon his sword hilt asked who had done this. But the mob, which by now numbered fifty or sixty, and was gathered about him in a triple circle, made no answer. They stood there staring sullenly, and in the fading light their faces seemed dangerous and hostile.

He was frightened. What could they mean? Yes, he was frightened, but he determined to brave it out, and lifted the cover from his meat, when something passed over his shoulder and fell into the dish, something stinking and abominable—to be particular, a dead cat. This was too much. Adrian sprang to his feet, and asked who dared thus to foul his food. The crowd did not jeer, did not even mock; it seemed too much in earnest for gibes, but a voice at the back called out:

"Take it to Dirk van Goorl. He'll be glad of it soon."

Now Adrian understood. All these people knew of his infamy; the whole of Leyden knew that tale. His lips turned dry, and the sweat broke out upon his body. What should he do? Brave it out? He sat down, and the fierce ring of silent faces drew a pace or two nearer. He tried to bid the man to bring more meat, but the words stuck in his throat. Now the mob saw his fear, and of a sudden seemed to augur his guilt from it, and to pass sentence on him in their hearts. At least, they who had been so dumb broke out into yells and hoots.

"Traitor!" "Spanish spy!" "Murderer!" they screamed. "Who gave evidence against our Dirk? Who sold his brother to the rack?"

Then came another shriller note. "Kill him." "Hang him up by the heels and stone him." "Twist off his tongue," and so forth. Out shot a hand, a long, skinny, female hand, and a harsh voice cried, "Give us a keepsake, my pretty boy!" Then there was a sharp wrench at his head, and he knew that from it a lock of hair was missing. This was too much. He ought to have stopped there and let them kill him if they would, but a terror of these human wolves entered his soul and mastered him. To be trodden beneath those mire-stained feet, to be rent by those filthy hands, to be swung up living by the ankles to some pole and then carved piecemeal—he could not bear it. He drew his sword and turned to fly.

"Stop him," yelled the mob, whereon he lunged at them wildly, running a small boy through the arm.

The sight of blood and the screech of the wounded lad settled the question, and those who were foremost came at him with a spring. But Adrian was swifter than they, and before a hand could be laid upon him, amidst a shower of stones and filth, he was speeding down the street. After

him came the mob, and then began one of the finest man-hunts that was ever known in Leyden.

From one street to another, round this turn and round that, sped the quarry, and after him, a swiftly growing pack, came the hounds. Some women drew a washing-line across the street to trip him. Adrian jumped it like a deer. Four men got ahead and tried to cut him off. He dodged them. Down the Bree Straat he went, and on his mother's door he saw a paper and guessed what was written there. They were gaining, they were gaining, for always fresh ones took the place of those who grew weary. There was but one chance for him now. Near by ran the Rhine, and here it was wide and unbridged. Perhaps they would not follow him through the water. In he went, having no choice, and swam for his life. They threw stones and bits of wood at him, and called for bows but, luckily for him, by now the night was falling fast, so that soon he vanished from their sight, and heard them crying to each other that he was drowned.

But Adrian was not drowned, for at that moment he was dragging himself painfully through the deep, greasy mud of the opposing bank and hiding among the old boats and lumber which were piled there, till his breath came to him again. But he could not stay long, for even if he had not been afraid that they would come and find him, it was too cold. So he crept away into the darkness.

Half an hour later, as, resting from their daily labours, Hague Simon and his consort Meg were seated at their evening meal, a knock came at the door, causing them to drop their knives and to look at each other suspiciously.

"Who can it be?" marvelled Meg.

Simon shook his fat head. "I have no appointment," he murmured, "and I don't like strange visitors. There's a nasty spirit abroad in the town, a very nasty spirit."



AFTER HIM CAME THE MOB



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"Go and see," said Meg.

"Go and see yourself, you ——" and he added an epithet calculated to anger the meekest woman.

She answered it with an oath and a metal plate, which struck him in the face, but before the quarrel could go farther, again came the sound of raps, this time louder and more hurried. Then Black Meg went to open the door, while Simon took a knife and hid himself behind a curtain. After some whispering, Meg bade the visitor enter, and ushered him into the room, that same fateful room where the evidence was signed. Now he was in the light, and she saw him.

"Oh! come here," she gasped. "Simon, come and look at our little grandee." So Simon came, whereon the pair of them, clapping their hands to their ribs, burst into screams of laughter.

"It's the Don! Mother of Heaven! it is the Don," gurgled Simon.

Well might they laugh, they who had known Adrian in his pride and rich attire, for before them, crouching against the wall, was a miserable, bareheaded object, his hair stained with mud and rotten eggs, blood running from his temple where a stone had caught him, his garments a mass of filth and dripping water, one boot gone and his hose burst to tatters. For a while the fugitive bore it, then suddenly, without a word, he drew the sword that still remained to him and rushed at the bestial looking Simon, who skipped away round the table.

"Stop laughing," he said, "or I will put this through you. I am a desperate man."

"You look it," said Simon, but he laughed no more, for the joke had become risky. "What do you want, Heer Adrian?"

"I want food and lodging for so long as I please to stop here. Don't be afraid, I have money to pay you."

"I am thinking that you are a dangerous guest," broke in Meg.

"I am," replied Adrian; "but I tell you that I shall be more dangerous outside. I was not the only one concerned in that matter of the evidence, and if they get me they will have you too. You understand?"

Meg nodded. She understood perfectly; for those of her trade Leyden was growing a risky habitation.

"We will accommodate you with our best, Mynheer," she said. "Come upstairs to the Master's room and put on some of his clothes. They will fit you well; you are much of the same figure."

Adrian's breath caught in his throat.

"Is he here?" he asked.

"No, but he keeps his room."

"Is he coming back?"

"I suppose so, sometime, as he keeps his room. Do you want to see him?"

"Very much, but you needn't mention it; my business can wait till we meet. Get my clothes washed and dried as quickly as you can, will you? I don't care about wearing other men's garments."

A quarter of an hour later Adrian, cleaned and clothed, different indeed to look on from the torn and hunted fugitive, re-entered the sitting-room. As he came, clad in Ramiro's suit, Meg nudged her husband and whispered, "Like, ain't they?"

"Like as two devils in hell," Simon answered critically, then added, "Your food is ready; come, Mynheer, and eat."

So Adrian ate and drank heartily enough, for the meat and wine were good, and he needed them. Also it rejoiced him in a dull way to find that there was something left in which he could take pleasure, even if it were but eating and drinking. When he had finished he told his story, or

so much of it as he wished to tell, and afterwards went to bed wondering whether his hosts would murder him in his sleep for the purse of gold he carried, half hoping that they might indeed, and slept for twelve hours without stirring.

All that day and until the evening of the next Adrian sat in the home of his spy hosts recovering his strength and brooding over his fearful fall. Black Meg brought in news of what passed without; thus he learned that his mother had sickened with the plague, and that the sentence of starvation was being carried out upon the body of her husband, Dirk van Goorl. He learned also the details of the escape of Foy and Martin, which were the talk of all the city. In the eyes of the common people they had become heroes, and some local poet had made a song about them which men were singing in the streets. Two verses of that song were devoted to him, Adrian; indeed Black Meg repeated them to him word by word with a suppressed but malignant joy. Yes, this was what had happened; his brother had become a popular hero and he, Adrian, who in every way was so infinitely that brother's superior, an object of popular execration. And of all this the man, Ramiro, was the cause.

Well, he was waiting for Ramiro. That was why he risked his life by staying in Leyden. Sooner or later Ramiro would be bound to visit this haunt of his, and then —here Adrian drew his rapier and lunged and parried, and finally with hissing breath drove it down into the wood of the flooring, picturing, in a kind of luxury of the imagination, that the throat of Ramiro was between its point and the ground. Of course in the struggle that must come, the said Ramiro, who doubtless was a skilful swordsman, might get the upper hand; it might be his, Adrian's throat, which was between the point and the ground. Well, if so, it scarcely mattered; he did not care. At any rate, for this

once he would play the man and then let the devil take his own; himself, or Ramiro, or both of them.

On the afternoon of the second day Adrian heard shouting in the streets, and Hague Simon came in and told him that a man had arrived with bad news from Mechlin; what it was he could not say, he was going to find out. A couple of hours went by and there was more shouting, this time of a determined and ordered nature. Then Black Meg appeared and informed him that the news from Mechlin was that everyone in that unhappy town had been massacred by the Spaniards; that further the people of Leyden had risen and were marching to attack the Gevangenhuis. Out she hurried again, for when the waters were stormy then Black Meg must go afishing.

Another hour went by, and once more the street door was opened with a key, to be carefully shut when the visitor had entered.

Simon or Meg, thought Adrian, but as he could not be sure he took the precaution of hiding himself behind the curtain. The door of the room opened, and not Meg or Simon, but Ramiro entered. So his opportunity had come!

The Master seemed disturbed. He sat down upon a chair and wiped his brow with a silk handkerchief. Then aloud, and shaking his fist in the air, he uttered a most comprehensive curse upon everybody and everything, but especially upon the citizens of Leyden. After this once more he lapsed into silence, sitting, his one eye fixed upon vacancy, and twisting his waxed moustaches with his hand.

Now was Adrian's chance; he had only to step out from behind the curtain and run him through before he could rise from his seat. The plan had great charms, and doubtless he might have put it into execution had not Adrian's histrionic instincts stayed his hand. If he killed Ramiro thus, he would never know why he had been killed, and above all things Adrian desired that he should know. He

wanted not only to wreak his wrongs, but to let his adversary learn why they were wreaked. Also, to do him justice, he preferred a fair fight to a secret stab delivered from behind, for gentlemen fought, but assassins stabbed.

Still, as there were no witnesses, he might have been willing to waive this point, if only he could make sure that Ramiro should learn the truth before he died. He thought of springing out and wounding him, and then, after he had explained matters, finishing him off at his leisure. But how could he be sure of his sword-thrust, which might do too much or too little? No, come what would, the matter must be concluded in the proper fashion.

Choosing his opportunity, Adrian stepped from behind the hanging and placed himself between Ramiro and the door, the bolt of which he shot adroitly that no one might interrupt their interview. At the sound Ramiro started and looked up. In an instant he grasped the situation, and though his bronzed face paled, for he knew that his danger was great, rose to it, as might have been expected from a gentleman of his long and varied experience.

"The Heer Adrian called van Goorl, as I live!" he said. "My friend and pupil, I am glad to see you; but, if I might ask, although the times are rough, why in this narrow room do you wave about a naked rapier in that dangerous fashion?"

"Villain," answered Adrian, "you know why; you have betrayed me and mine, and I am dishonoured, and now I am going to kill you in payment."

"I see," said Ramiro, "the van Goorl affair again. I can never be clear of it for half an hour even. Well, before you begin, it may interest you to know that your worthy stepfather, after a couple of days' fasting, is by now, I suppose, free, for the rabble have stormed the Gevangenhuis. Truth, however, compels me to add that he is suffering badly from the plague, which your excellent mother, with

a resource that does her credit, managed to communicate to him, thinking this end less disagreeable on the whole than that which the law had appointed."

Thus spoke Ramiro, slowly and with purpose, for all the while he was so manœuvring that the light from the lattice fell full upon his antagonist, leaving himself in the shadow, a position which experience taught him would prove of advantage in emergency.

Adrian made no answer, but lifted his sword.

"One moment, young gentleman," went on Ramiro, drawing his own weapon and putting himself on guard; "are you in earnest? Do you really wish to fight?"

"Yes," answered Adrian.

"What a fool you must be," mused Ramiro. "Why at your age should you seek to be rid of life, seeing that you have no more chance against me than a rat in a corner against a terrier dog? Look!" and suddenly he lunged most viciously straight at his heart. But Adrian was watching and parried the thrust.

"Ah!" continued Ramiro, "I knew you would do that, otherwise I should not have let fly, for all the angels know I do not wish to hurt you." But to himself he added, "The lad is more dangerous than I thought—my life hangs on it. The old fault, friend, too high, too high!"

Then Adrian came at him like a tiger, and for the next thirty seconds nothing was heard in the room but the raspings of steel and the hard breathing of the two men.

At first Adrian had somewhat the better of it, for his assault was fierce, and he forced the older and cooler man to be satisfied with guarding himself. He did more indeed, for presently thrusting over Ramiro's guard, he wounded him slightly in the left arm. The sting of his hurt seemed to stir Ramiro's blood; at any rate he changed his tactics and began to attack in turn. Now, moreover, his skill and seasoned strength came to his aid; slowly but surely Adrian

was driven back before him till his retreat in the narrow confines of the room became continuous. Suddenly, half from exhaustion and half because of a stumble, he reeled right across it, to the further wall indeed. With a guttural sound of triumph Ramiro sprang after him to make an end of him while his guard was down, caught his foot on a joined stool which had been overset in the struggle, and fell prone to the ground.

This was Adrian's chance. In an instant he was on him and had the point of his rapier at his throat. But he did not stab at once, not from any compunction, but because he wished his enemy to feel a little before he died, for, like all his race, Adrian could be vindictive and bloodthirsty enough when his hate was roused. Rapidly Ramiro considered the position. In a physical sense he was helpless, for Adrian had one foot upon his breast, the other upon his sword-arm, and the steel at his throat. Therefore if time were given him he must trust to his wit.

"Make ready, you are about to die," said Adrian.

"I think not," replied the prostrate Ramiro.

"Why not?" asked Adrian, astonished.

"If you will be so kind as to move that sword-point a little—it is pricking me—thank you. Now I will tell you why. Because it is not usual for a son to stick his father as though he were a farmyard pig."

"Son? Father?" said Adrian. "Do you mean——?"

"Yes, I do mean that we have the happiness of filling those sacred relationships to each other."

"You lie," said Adrian.

"Let me stand up, and give me my sword, young sir, and you shall pay for that. Never yet did a man tell the Count Juan de Montalvo that he lied, and live."

"Prove it," said Adrian.

"In this position, to which misfortune, not skill, has reduced me, I can prove nothing. But if you doubt it, ask

your mother, or your hosts, or consult the registers of the Groote Kerke, and see whether on a date, which I will give you, Juan de Montalvo was, or was not, married to Lysbeth van Hout, of which marriage was born one Adrian. Man, I will prove it to you. Had I not been your father, would you have been saved from the Inquisition with others, and should I not within the last five minutes have run you through twice over, for though you fought well, your swordsmanship is no match for mine?"

"Even if you are my father, why should I not kill you, who have forced me to your will by threats of death, you who wronged and shamed me, you because of whom I have been hunted through the streets like a mad dog, and made an outcast?" And Adrian looked so fierce, and brought down his sword so close, that hope sank very low in Ramiro's heart.

"There are reasons which might occur to the religious," he said, "but I will give you one that will appeal to your self-interest. If you kill me, the curse which follows the parricide will follow you to your last hour—of the beyond I say nothing."

"It would need to be a heavy one," answered Adrian, "if it was worse than that of which I know." But there was hesitation in his voice, for Ramiro, the skilful player upon human hearts, had struck the right string, and Adrian's superstitious nature answered to the note.

"Son," went on Ramiro, "be wise and hold your hand before you do that for which all hell itself would cry shame upon you. You think that I have been your enemy, but it is not so; all this while I have striven to work you good, but how can I talk lying thus like a calf before its butcher? Take the swords, both of them, and let me sit up, and I will tell you all my plans for the advantage of us both. Or if you wish it, thrust on and make an end. I will not plead for my life with you; it is not worthy of an hidalgo of

Spain. Moreover, what is life to me who have known so many sorrows that I should seek to cling to it? Oh! God, who seest all, receive my soul, and I pray Thee pardon this youth his horrible crime, for he is mad and foolish, and will live to sorrow for the deed."

Since it was no further use to him, Ramiro had let the sword fall from his hand. Drawing it towards him with the point of his own weapon, Adrian stooped and picked it up.

"Rise," he said, lifting his foot, "I can kill you afterwards if I wish."

Could he have looked into the heart of his new-found parent as stiff and aching he staggered to his feet, the execution would not have been long delayed.

"Oh! my young friend, you have given me a nasty fright," thought Ramiro to himself, "but it is over now, and if I don't pay you out before I have done with you, my sweet boy, your name is not Adrian."

Ramiro rose, dusted his garments, seated himself deliberately, and began to talk with great earnestness. It will be sufficient to summarise his arguments. First of all, with the most convincing sincerity, he explained that when he had made use of him, Adrian, he had no idea that he was his son. Of course this was a statement that will not bear a moment's examination, but Ramiro's object was to gain time, and Adrian let it pass. Then he explained that it was only after his mother had, not by his wish, but accidentally, seen the written evidence upon which her husband was convicted, that he found out that Adrian van Goorl was her child and his own. However, as he hurried to point out, all these things were now ancient history that had no bearing on the present. Owing to the turbulent violence of the mob, which had just driven him from his post and fortress, he, Ramiro, was in temporary difficulties, and owing to other circumstances, he, Adrian, was, so far

as his own party and people were concerned, an absolutely dishonoured person. In this state of affairs he had a suggestion to make. Let them join forces; let the natural relationship that existed between them, and which had been so nearly severed by a sword thrust that both must have regretted, become real and tender. He, the father, had rank, although it suited him to sink it; he had wide experience, friends, intelligence, and the prospect of enormous wealth, which, of course, he could not expect to enjoy for ever. On the other side, he, the son, had youth, great beauty of person, agreeable and distinguished manners, a high heart, the education of a young man of the world, ambition and powers of mind that would carry him far, and for the immediate future an object to gain, the affection of a lady whom all acknowledged to be as good as she was charming, and as charming as she was personally attractive.

"She hates me," broke in Adrian.

"Ah!" laughed Ramiro, "there speaks the voice of small experience. Oh! youth, so easily exalted and so easily depressed! Joyous, chequered youth! How many happy marriages have I not known begin with such hate as this? Well, there it is, you must take my word for it. If you want to marry Elsa Brant, I can manage it for you, and if not, why, you can leave it alone."

Adrian reflected, then as his mind had a practical side, he put a question.

"You spoke of the prospect of enormous wealth; what is it?"

"I will tell you, I will tell you," whispered his parent, looking about him cautiously; "it is the vast hoard of Hendrik Brant which I intend to recover; indeed, my search for it has been at the root of all this trouble. And now, son, you can see how open I have been with you, for if you marry Elsa that money will legally be your property, and I can only claim whatever it may please you to give

me. Well, as to that question, in the spirit of the glorious motto of our race, 'Trust to God and me,' I shall leave it to your sense of honour, which, whatever its troubles, has never yet failed the house of Montalvo. What does it matter to me who is the legal owner of the stuff, so long as it remains in the family?"

"Of course not," replied Adrian, loftily, "especially as I am not mercenary."

"Ah! well," went on Ramiro, "we have talked for a long while, and if I continue to live there are affairs to which I ought to attend. You have heard all I have to say, and you have the swords in your hand, and, of course, I am—only your prisoner on parole. So now, my son, be so good as to settle this matter without further delay. Only, if you make up your mind to use the steel, allow me to show you where to thrust, as I do not wish to undergo any unnecessary discomfort"—and he stood before him and bowed in a very courtly and dignified fashion.

Adrian looked at him and hesitated. "I don't trust you," he said; "you have tricked me once and I daresay that you will trick me again. Also I don't think much of people who masquerade under false names and lay such traps as you laid to get my evidence against the rest of them. But I am in a bad place and without friends. I want to marry Elsa and recover my position in the world; also, as you know well, I can't cut the throat of my own father in cold blood," and he threw down one of the swords.

"Your decision is just such as I should have expected from my knowledge of your noble nature, son Adrian," remarked Ramiro as he picked up his weapon and restored it to the scabbard. "But now, before we enter upon this perfect accord, I have two little stipulations to make on my side."

"What are they?" asked Adrian.

"First, that our friendship should be complete, such as

ought to exist between a loving father and son, a friendship without reservations. Secondly—this is a condition that I fear you may find harder—but, although fortune has led me into stony paths, and I fear some doubtful expedients, there was always one thing which I have striven to cherish and keep pure, and that in turn has rewarded me for my devotion in many a dangerous hour, my religious belief. Now I am Catholic, and I could wish that my son should be Catholic also; these horrible errors, believe me, are as dangerous to the soul as just now they happen to be fatal to the body. May I hope that you, who were brought up but not born in heresy, will consent to receive instruction in the right faith?"

"Certainly you may," answered Adrian, almost with enthusiasm. "I have had enough of conventicles, psalm-singing, and the daily chance of being burned; indeed, from the time when I could think for myself I always wished to be a Catholic."

"Your words make me a happy man," answered Ramiro. "Allow me to unbolt the door, I hear our hosts. Worthy Simon and Vrouw, I make you parties to a solemn and joyful celebration. This young man is my son, and in token of my fatherly love, which he has been pleased to desire, I now take him in my arms and embrace him before you," and he suited the action to the word.

But Black Meg, watching his face in astonishment from over Adrian's shoulder, saw its one bright eye suddenly become eclipsed. Could it be that the noble Master had winked?

CHAPTER XXIV

MARTHA PREACHES A SERMON AND TELLS A SECRET

Two days after his reconciliation with his father, Adrian was admitted a member of the Catholic Church. His preparation had been short; indeed, it consisted of three interviews with a priest who was brought to the house at night. The good man found in his pupil so excellent a disposition and a mind so open to his teaching that, acting on a hint given him by Ramiro, who, for reasons of his own not altogether connected with religion, was really anxious to see his son a member of the true and Catholic Church, he declared it unnecessary to prolong the period of probation. Therefore, on the third day, as the dusk of evening was closing, for in the present state of public feeling they dared not go out while it was light, Adrian was taken to the baptistery of the Groote Kerke. Here he made confession of his sins to a certain Abbé known as Father Dominic, a simple ceremony, for although the list of them which he had prepared was long, its hearing proved short. Thus all his offences against his family, such as his betrayal of his stepfather, were waived aside by the priest as matters of no account; indeed, crimes of this nature, he discovered, to the sacerdotal eye wore the face of virtue. Other misdoings also, such as a young man might have upon his mind, were not thought weighty. What really was considered important proved to be the earnestness of his recantation of heretical errors, and when once his confessor was satisfied upon that point, the penitent soul was relieved by absolution full and free.

After this came the service of his baptism, which, be-

cause Ramiro wished it, for a certain secret reason, was carried out with as much formal publicity as the circumstances would allow. Indeed, several priests assisted at the rite, Adrian's sponsors being his father and the estimable Hague Simon, who was paid a gold piece for his pains. While the sacrament was still in progress, an untoward incident occurred. From its commencement the trampling and voices of a mob had been heard in the open space in front of the church, and now they began to hammer on the great doors and to cast stones at the painted windows, breaking the beautiful and ancient glass. Presently a beadle hurried into the baptistery, and whispered something in the ear of the Abbé which caused that ecclesiastic to turn pale and to conclude the service in a somewhat hasty fashion.

"What is it?" asked Ramiro.

"Alas! my son," said the priest, "these heretic dogs saw you, or our new-found brother, I know not which—enter this holy place, and a great mob of them have surrounded it, ravening for our blood."

"Then we had best begone," said Ramiro.

"Señor, it is impossible," broke in the sacristan; "they watch every door. Hark! hark! hark!" and as he spoke there came the sound of battering on the oaken portals.

"Can your reverences make any suggestion?" asked Ramiro, "for if not—" and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Let us pray," said one of them in a trembling voice.

"By all means, but I should prefer to do so as I go. Fool, is there any hiding-place in this church, or must we stop here to have our throats cut?"

Then the sacristan, with white lips and knocking knees, whispered:

"Follow me, all of you. Stay, blow out the lights."

So the candles were extinguished, and in the darkness they grasped each other's hands and were led by the verger whither they knew not. Across the wide spaces of the

empty church they crawled, its echoing silence contrasting strangely with the muffled roar of angry voices without and the dull sound of battering on the doors. One of their number, the fat Abbé Dominic, became separated from them in the gloom, and wandered away down an arm of the vast transept, whence they could hear him calling to them. The sacristan called back, but Ramiro fiercely bade him to be silent, adding:

"Are we all to be snared for the sake of one priest?"

So they went on, till presently in that great place his shouts grew fainter, and were lost in the roar of the multitude without.

"Here is the spot," muttered the sacristan, after feeling the flooring with his hands, and by a dim ray of moonlight which just then pierced the windows of the choir, Adrian saw that there was a hole in the pavement before him.

"Descend, there are steps," said their guide. "I will shut the stone," and one by one they passed down six or seven narrow steps into some darksome place.

"Where are we?" asked a priest of the verger, when he had pulled the stone close and joined them.

"In the family vault of the noble Count van Valkenburg, whom your reverence buried three days ago. Fortunately the masons have not yet come to cement down the stone. If your Excellencies find it close, you can get air by standing upon the coffin of the noble Count."

Adrian did find it close, and took the hint, to discover that in a line with his head was some filigree stonework, pierced with small apertures, the front doubtless of the marble tomb in the church above, for through them he could see the pale moon rays wavering on the pavement of the choir. As he looked the priest at his side muttered:

"Hark! The doors are down. Aid us, St. Pancras!" and falling upon his knees he began to pray very earnestly.

Yielding at last to the blows of the battering-beam, the

great portals had flown open with a crash, and now through them poured the mob. On they came with a rush and a roar, like that of the sea breaking through a dyke, carrying in their hands torches, lanterns hung on poles, axes, swords and staves, till at length they reached the screen of wonderful carved oak, on the top of which, rising to a height of sixty feet above the floor of the church, stood the great Rood, with the images of the Virgin and St. John on either side. Here, of a sudden, the vastness and the silence of the holy place which they had known, every one, from childhood, with its echoing aisles, the moonlit, pictured windows, its consecrated lamps twinkling here and there like fisher lights upon the darkling waters, seemed to take hold of them. As at the sound of the Voice Divine sweeping down the wild waves at night, the winds ceased their raving and the seas were still, so now, beneath the silent reproach of the effigy of the White Christ standing with uplifted hand above the altar, hanging thorn-crowned upon the Rood, kneeling agonised within the Garden, seated at the Holy Supper, on His lips the New Commandment, "As I have loved you, so ye also love one another," their passions flickered down and their wrath slept.

"They are not here, let us be going," said a voice.

"They are here," answered another voice, a woman's voice with a note of vengeance in it. "I tracked them to the doors, the Spanish murderer Ramiro, the spy Hague Simon, the traitor Adrian, called van Goorl, and the priests, the priests, the priests who butcher us."

"Let God deal with them," said the first voice, which to Adrian sounded familiar. "We have done enough. Go home in peace."

Now muttering, "The pastor is right. Obey the Pastor Arentz," the more orderly of the multitude turned to depart, when suddenly, from the far end of the transept, arose a cry.

"Here's one of them. Catch him! catch him!" A minute more and into the circle of the torchlight rushed the Abbé Dominic, his eyes starting from his head with terror, his rent robe flapping on the ground. Exhausted and bewildered he cast himself down, and grasping the pedestal of an image began to cry for mercy, till a dozen fierce hands dragged him to his feet again.

"Let him go," said the voice of the Pastor Arentz. "We fight the Church, not its ministers."

"Hear me first," she answered who had spoken before, and men turned to see standing above them in the great pulpit of the church, a fierce-eyed, yellow-toothed hag, grey-haired, skinny-armed, long-faced like a horse, and behind her two other women, each of whom held a torch in her right hand.

"It is the Mare," roared the multitude. "It is Martha of the Mere. Preach on, Martha. What's your text?"

"Whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed," she answered in a ringing, solemn voice, and instantly a deep silence fell upon the place.

"You call me the Mare," she went on. "Do you know how I got that name? They gave it me after they had shrivelled up my lips and marred the beauty of my face with irons. And do you know what they made me do? They made me carry my husband to the stake upon my back because they said that a horse must be ridden. And do you know who said this? *That priest who stands before you.*"

As the words left her lips a yell of rage beat against the roof. Martha held up her thin hand, and again there was silence.

"He said it—the holy Father Dominic; let him deny it if he can. What? He does not know me? Perchance not, for time and grief and madness and hot pincers have

changed the face of Vrouw Martha van Muyden, who was called the Lily of Brussels. Ah! look at him now. He remembers the Lily of Brussels. He remembers her husband and her son also, for he burned them. O God, judge between us. O people, deal with that devil as God shall teach you.

"Who are the others? He who is called Ramiro, the Governor of the Gevangenhuis, the man who years ago would have thrust me beneath the ice to drown had not the Vrouw van Goorl bought my life; he who set her husband, Dirk van Goorl, the man you loved, to starve to death sniffing the steam of kitchens. O people, deal with that devil as God shall teach you.

"And the third, the half-Spaniard, the traitor Adrian called van Goorl, he who has come here to-night to be baptised anew into the bosom of the Holy Church; he who signed the evidence upon which Dirk was murdered"—here, again, the roar of hate and rage went up and beat along the roof—"upon which too his brother Foy was taken to the torture, whence Red Martin saved him. O people, do with that devil also as God shall teach you.

"And the fourth, Hague Simon the spy, the man whose hands for years have smoked with innocent blood; Simon the Butcher—Simon the false witness——"

"Enough, enough!" roared the crowd. "A rope, a rope; up with him to the arm of the Rood."

"My friends," cried Arentz, "let the man go. 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, and I will repay.'"

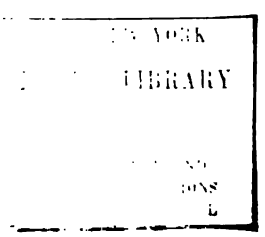
"Yes, but we will give him something on account," shouted a voice in bitter blasphemy. "Well climbed, Jan, well climbed," and they looked up to see, sixty feet above their heads, seated upon the arm of the lofty Rood, a man with a candle bound upon his brow and a coil of rope upon his back.

"He'll fall," said one.



"AH! LOOK AT HIM NOW"




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"Pish!" answered another, "it is steeplejack Jan, who can hang on a wall like a fly."

"Look out for the ends of the rope," cried the thin voice above, and down they came..

"Spare me," screamed the wretched priest, as his executioners caught hold of him.

"Yes, yes, as you spared the Heer Jansen a few months ago."

"It was to save his soul," groaned Dominic.

"Quite so, and now we are going to save yours; your own medicine, father, your own medicine."

"Spare me, and I will tell you where the others are."

"Well, where are they?" asked the ringleader, pushing his companions away.

"Hidden in the church, hidden in the church."

"We knew that, you traitorous dog. Now then for the soul-saving. Catch hold there and run away with it. A horse should be ridden, father—your own saying—and an angel must learn to fly."

Thus ended the life of the Abbé Dominic at the hands of avenging men. Without a doubt they were fierce and bloody-minded, for the reader must not suppose that all the wickedness of those days lies on the heads of the Inquisition and the Spaniards. The adherents of the New Religion did evil things also, things that sound dreadful in our ears. In excuse of them, however, this can be urged, that, compared to those of their oppressors, they were as single trees to a forest full; also that they who worked them had been maddened by their sufferings. If our fathers, husbands and brothers had been burned at the stake, or done to death under the name of Jesus in the dens of the Inquisition, or slaughtered by thousands in the sack of towns; if our wives and daughters had been shamed, if our houses had been burned, our goods taken, our liberties trampled upon, and our homes made a desolation, then, my reader, is it not

possible that even in these different days you and I might have been cruel when our hour came? God knows alone, and God be thanked that so far as we can foresee, except under the pressure, perhaps, of invasion by semi-barbarian hordes, or of dreadful and sudden social revolutions, civilized human nature will never be put to such a test again.

Far aloft in the gloom there, swinging from the arm of the Cross, whose teachings his life had mocked, like some mutinous sailor at the yard of the vessel he had striven to betray, the priest hung dead, but his life did not appease the fury of the triumphant mob.

"The others," they cried, "find the others," and with torches and lanterns they hunted round the great church. They ascended the belfry, they rummaged the chapels, they explored the crypt; then, baffled, drew together in a countless crowd in the nave, shouting, gesticulating, suggesting.

"Get dogs," cried a voice; "dogs will smell them out;" and dogs were brought, which yapped and ran to and fro, but, confused by the multitude, and not knowing what to seek, found nothing. Then some one threw an image from a niche, and next minute, with a cry of "Down with the idols," the work of destruction began.

Fanatics sprang at the screens and the altars, "all the carved work thereof they break down with hatchet and hammer," they tore the hangings from the shrines, they found the sacred cups, and filling them with sacramental wine, drank with gusts of ribald laughter. In the centre of the choir they built a bonfire, and fed it with pictures, carvings, and oaken benches, so that it blazed and roared furiously. On to it—for this mob did not come to steal but to work vengeance—they threw utensils of gold and silver, the priceless jewelled offerings of generations, and danced around its flames in triumph, while from every side came the crash of falling statues and the tinkling of shattered glass.

The light of that furnace shone through the lattice stonework of the tomb, and in its lurid and ominous glare Adrian beheld the faces of those who refuged with him. What a picture it was; the niches filled with mouldering boxes, the white gleam of human bones that here and there had fallen from them, the bright furnishings and velvet pall of the coffin of the newcomer on which he stood—and then those faces. The priests, still crouched in corners, rolling on the ground, their white lips muttering who knows what; the sacristan in a swoon, Hague Simon hugging a coffin in a niche, as a drowning man hugs a plank, and, standing in the midst of them, calm, sardonic and watchful, a drawn rapier in his hand, his father Ramiro.

"We are lost," moaned a priest, losing control of himself. "We are lost. They will kill us as they have killed the holy Abbé."

"We are not lost," hissed Ramiro, "we are quite safe, but, friend, if you open that cursed mouth of yours again it shall be for the last time," and he lifted his sword, adding, "Silence; he who speaks, dies."

How long did it last? Was it one hour, or two or three? None of them knew, but at length the image-breaking was done, and it came to an end. The interior of the church, with all its wealth and adornments, was utterly destroyed, but happily the flames did not reach the roof, and the walls could not catch fire.

By degrees the iconoclasts wearied; there seemed to be nothing more to break, and the smoke choked them. Two or three at a time they left the ravaged place, and once more it became solemn and empty; a symbol of Eternity mocking Time, of Peace conquering Tumult, of the Patience and Purpose of God triumphant over the passions and ravings of Man. Little curls of smoke went up from the smouldering fire; now and again a fragment of shattered stonework fell with an echoing crash, and the cold

wind of the coming winter sighed through the gaping windows. The deed was done, the revenge of a tortured multitude had set its seal upon the ancient fane in which their forefathers worshipped for a score of generations, and once more quiet brooded upon the place, and the shafts of the sweet moonlight pierced its desecrated solitudes.

One by one, like ghosts arising at a summons of the Spirit, the fugitives crept from the shelter of the tomb, crept across the transepts to the little door of the baptistery, and with infinite peeping and precaution, out into the night, to vanish this way and that, hugging their hearts as though to feel whether they still beat safely in their bosoms.

As he passed the Rood Adrian looked up, and there, above the broken carvings and the shattered statue of the Virgin, hung the calm face of the Saviour crowned with thorns. There, too, not far from it, looking small and infinitely piteous at that great height, and revolving slowly in the sharp draught from the broken windows, hung another dead face, the horrid face of the Abbé Dominic, lately the envied, prosperous dignitary and pluralist, who not four hours since had baptised him into the bosom of the Church, and who now himself had been born again into the bosom of whatever world awaited him beyond the Gates. It terrified Adrian; no ghost could have frightened him more, but he set his teeth and staggered on, guided by the light gleaming faintly on the sword of Ramiro—to whatever haven that sword should lead him.

Before dawn broke it had led him out of Leyden.

It was after ten o'clock that night when a woman, wrapped in a rough frieze coat, knocked at the door of the house in the Bree Straat and asked for the Vrouw van Goorl.

"My mistress lies between life and death with the

plague," answered the servant. "Get you gone from this pest-house, whoever you are."

"I do not fear the plague," said the visitor. "Is the Jufvrouw Elsa Brant still up? Then tell her that Martha, called the Mare, would speak with her."

"She can see none at such an hour," answered the servant.

"Tell her I come from Foy van Goorl."

"Enter," said the servant wondering, and shut the door behind her.

A minute later Elsa, pale-faced, worn, but still beautiful, rushed into the room, gasping, "What news? Does he live? Is he well?"

"He lives, lady, but he is not well, for the wound in his thigh has festered and he cannot walk, or even stand. Nay, have no fear, time and clean dressing will heal him, and he lies in a safe place."

In the rapture of her relief Elsa seized the woman's hand, and would have kissed it.

"Touch it not, it is bloodstained," said Martha, drawing her hand away.

"Blood? Whose blood is on it?" asked Elsa, shrinking back.

"Whose blood?" answered Martha with a hollow laugh; "why that of many a Spanish man. Where, think you, lady, that the Mare gallops of nights? Ask it of the Spaniards who travel by the Haarlemer Meer. Aye, and now Red Martin is with me and we run together, taking our tithe where we can gather it."

"Oh! tell me no more," said Elsa. "From day to day it is ever the same tale, a tale of death. Nay, I know your wrongs have driven you mad, but that a woman should slay——"

"A woman! I am no woman; my womanhood died with my husband and my son. Girl, I tell you that I am no

woman; I am a Sword of God myself appointed to the sword. And so to the end I kill, and kill and kill till the hour when I am killed. Go, look in the church yonder, and see who hangs to the high arm of the Rood—the fat Abbé Dominic. Well, I sent him there to-night; to-morrow you will hear how I turned parson and preached a sermon—aye, and Ramiro and Adrian called van Goorl, and Simon the spy, should have joined him there, only I could not find them because their hour has not come. But the idols are down and the paintings burnt, and the gold and silver and jewels are cast upon the dung-heap. Swept and garnished is the temple, made clean and fit for the Lord to dwell in."

"Made clean with the blood of murdered priests, and fit by the smoke of sacrilege?" broke in Elsa. "Oh! woman, how can you do such wicked things and not be afraid?"

"Afraid?" she answered. "Those who have passed through hell have no more fear; death I seek, and when judgment comes I will say to the Lord: What have I done that the Voice which speaks to me at night did not tell me to do? Look down, the blood of my husband and my son still smokes upon the ground. Hearken, Lord God, it cries to Thee for vengeance!" and as she spoke she lifted her blackened hands and shook them. Then she went on.

"They murdered your father, why do you not kill them also? You are small and weak and timid, and could not run by night and use the knife as I do, but there is poison. I can brew it and bring it to you, made from marsh herbs, white as water and deadly as Death himself. What! You shrink from such things? Well, girl, once I was as beautiful as you and as loving and beloved, and I can do them for my love's sake—for my love's sake. Nay, *I* do not do them, they are done through me. The Sword am I, the Sword! And you too are a sword, though you know it not, though you see it not, you, maiden, so soft and white and

sweet, are a Sword of Vengeance working the death of men; I, in my way, you in yours, paying back, back, back, full measure pressed down and running over to those appointed to die. The treasure of Hendrik Brant, your treasure, it is red with blood, every piece of it. I tell you that the deaths that I have done are but as a grain of sand to a bowlful compared to those which your treasure shall do. There, maid, I fright you. Have no fear, it is but Mad Martha, who, when she sees, must speak, and through the flames in the kirk to-night I saw visions such as I have not seen for years."

"Tell me more of Foy and Martin," said Elsa, who was frightened and bewildered.

At her words a change seemed to come over this woman, at once an object of pity and of terror, for the scream went out of her voice and she answered quietly,

"They reached me safe enough five days ago, Red Martin carrying Foy upon his back. From afar I saw him, a naked man with a naked sword, and knew him by his size and beard. And oh! when I heard his tale I laughed as I have not laughed since I was young."

"Tell it me," said Elsa.

And she told it while the girl listened with clasped hands.

"Oh! it was brave, brave," she murmured. "Red Martin forcing to the door and Foy, weak and wounded, slaying the warder. Was there ever such a story?"

"Men are brave and desperate with the torture pit behind them," answered Martha grimly; "but they did well, and now they are safe with me where no Spaniard can find them unless they hunt in great companies after the ice forms and the reeds are dead."

"Would that I could be there also," said Elsa, "but I tend his mother who is very sick, so sick that I do not know whether she will live or die."

"Nay, you are best here among your people," answered

Martha. "And now that the Spaniards are driven out, here Foy shall return also so soon as it is safe for him to travel; but as yet he cannot stir, and Red Martin stays to watch him. Before long, however, he must move, for I have tidings that the Spaniards are about to besiege Haarlem with a great army, and then the Mere will be no longer safe for us, and I shall leave it to fight with the Haarlem folk."

"And Foy and Martin will return?"

"I think so, if they are not stopped."

"Stopped?"—and she put her hand upon her heart.

"The times are rough, Jufvrouw Elsa. Who that breathes the air one morning can know what breath will pass his nostrils at the nightfall? The times are rough, and Death is king of them. The hoard of Hendrik Brant is not forgotten, nor those who have its key. Ramiro slipped through my hands to-night, and doubtless by now is far away from Leyden seeking the treasure."

"The treasure! Oh! that thrice accursed treasure!" broke in Elsa, shivering as though beneath an icy wind; "would that we were rid of it."

"That you cannot be until it is appointed, for is this not the heritage which your father died to save? Listen. Do you know, lady, where it lies hid?" and she dropped her voice to a whisper.

Elsa shook her head, saying:

"I neither know nor wish to know."

"Still it is best that you should be told, for we three who have the secret may be killed, every one of us—no, not the place, but where to seek a clue to the place."

Elsa looked at her questioningly, and Martha, leaning forward, whispered in her ear:

"*It lies in the hilt of the Sword Silence.* If Red Martin should be taken or killed, seek out his sword and open the hilt. Do you understand?"

Elsa nodded and answered, "But if aught happens to Martin the sword may be lost."

Martha shrugged her shoulders. "Then the treasure will be lost also, that is if I am gone. It is as God wills; but at least in name you are the heiress, and you should know where to find its secret, which may serve you or your country in good stead in time to come. I give you no paper, I tell you only where to seek a paper, and now I must be gone to reach the borders of the Mere by daybreak. Have you any message for your love, lady?"

"I would write a word, if you can wait. They will bring you food."

"Good; write on and I will eat. Love for the young and meat for the old, and for both let God be thanked."

CHAPTER XXV

THE RED MILL

AFTER a week's experience of that delectable dwelling and its neighbourhood, Adrian began to grow weary of the Red Mill. Nine or ten Dutch miles to the nor'-west of Haarlem is a place called Velsen, situated on the borders of the sand-dunes, to the south of what is known to-day as the North Sea Canal. In the times of which this page of history tells, however, the canal was represented by a great drainage dyke, and Velsen was but a deserted village. Indeed, hereabouts all the country was deserted, for some years before a Spanish force had passed through it, burning, slaying, laying waste, so that few were left to tend the windmills and repair the dyke. Holland is a country won from swamps and seas, and if the water is not pumped out of it, and the ditches are not cleaned, very quickly it relapses into primeval marsh; indeed, it is fortunate if the ocean, bursting through the feeble barriers reared by the industry of man, does not turn it into vast lagoons of salt water.

Once the Red Mill had been a pumping station, which, when the huge sails worked, delivered the water from the fertile meadows into the great dyke, whence it ran through sluice gates to the North Sea. Now, although the embankment of this dyke still held, the meadows had gone back into swamps. Rising out of these—for it was situated upon a low mound of earth, raised, doubtless, as a point of refuge by marsh-dwellers who lived and died before history began, towered the wreck of a narrow-waisted windmill, built of brick below and wood above, of very lonesome and com-

manding appearance in its gaunt solitude. There were no houses near it, no cattle grazed about its foot; it was a dead thing in a dead landscape. To the left, but separated from it by a wide and slimy dyke, whence in times of flood the thick, brackish water trickled to the plain, stretched an arid area of sand-dunes, clothed with sparse grass, that grew like bristles upon the back of a wild hog. Beyond these dunes the ocean roared and moaned and whispered hungrily as the wind and weather stirred its depths. In front, not fifty paces away, ran the big dyke like a raised road, secured by embankments, and discharging day by day its millions of gallons of water into the sea. But these embankments were weakening now, and here and there could be seen a spot which looked as though a giant ploughshare had been drawn up them, for a groove of brown earth scarred the face of green, where in some winter flood the water had poured over to find its level, cutting them like cheese, but when its volume sank, leaving them still standing, and as yet sufficient for their purpose.

To the right again and behind, were more marshes, broken only in the distance by the towers of Haarlem and the spires of village churches, marshes where the snipe and bittern boomed, the herons fed, and in summer the frogs croaked all night long.

Such was the refuge to which Ramiro and his son, Adrian, had been led by Hague Simon and Black Meg, after they had escaped with their lives from Leyden upon the night of the image-breaking in the church, that ominous night when the Abbé Dominic gave up the ghost on the arm of the lofty Rood, and Adrian had received absolution and baptism from his consecrated hand.

On the journey thither Adrian asked no questions as to their destination; he was too broken in heart and too shaken in body to be curious; life in those days was for him too much of a hideous phantasmagoria of waste and

blackness out of which appeared vengeful, red-handed figures, out of which echoed dismal, despairing voices calling him to doom.

They came to the place and found its great basement and the floors above, or some of them, furnished after a fashion. The mill had been inhabited, and recently, as Adrian gathered, by smugglers, or thieves, with whom Meg and Simon were in alliance, or some such outcast evil-doers who knew that here the arm of the law could not reach them. Though, indeed, while Alva ruled in the Netherlands there was little law to be feared except by those who were rich or who dared to worship God after their own manner.

"Why have we come here—father," Adrian was about to add, but the word stuck in his throat.

Ramiro shrugged his shoulders and looked round him with his one criticising eye.

"Because our guides and friends, the worthy Simon and his wife, assure me that in this spot alone our throats are for the present safe, and by St. Pancras, after what we saw in the church yonder I am inclined to agree with them. He looked a poor thing up under the roof there, the holy Father Dominic, didn't he, hanging like a black spider from the end of his cord? Bah! my backbone aches when I think of him."

"And how long are we to stop here?"

"Till—till Don Frederic has taken Haarlem and these fat Hollanders, or those who are left of them, lick our boots for mercy," and he ground his teeth, then added: "Son, do you play cards? Good, well let us have a game. Here are dice; it will serve to turn our thoughts. Now then, a hundred guilders on it."

So they played and Adrian won, whereon, to his amazement, his father paid him the money.

"What is the use of that?" asked Adrian.

"Gentlemen should always pay their debts at cards."

"And if they cannot?"

"Then they must keep score of the amount and discharge it when they are able. Look you, young man, everything else you may forget, but what you lose over the dice is a debt of honour. There lives no man who can say that I cheated him of a guilder at cards, though I fear some others have my name standing in their books."

When they rose from their game that night Adrian had won between three and four hundred florins. Next day his winnings amounted to a thousand florins, for which his father gave him a carefully-executed note of hand; but at the third sitting the luck changed or perhaps skill began to tell, and he lost two thousand florins. These he paid up by returning his father's note, his own winnings, and all the balance of the purse of gold which his mother had given to him when he was driven from the house, so that now he was practically penniless.

The rest of the history may be guessed. At every game the stakes were increased, for since Adrian could not pay, it was a matter of indifference to him how much he wagered. Moreover, he found a kind of mild excitement in playing at the handling of such great sums of money. By the end of a week he had lost a queen's dowry. As they rose from the table that night his father filled in the usual form, requested him to be so good as to sign it, and a sour-faced woman who had arrived at the mill, Adrian knew not whence, to do the household work, to put her name as witness.

"What is the use of this farce?" asked Adrian. "Brant's treasure would scarcely pay that bill."

His father pricked his ears.

"Indeed? I lay it at as much again. What is the use? Who knows—one day you might become rich, for, as the great Emperor said, 'Fortune is a woman who reserves her favours for the young,' and then, doubtless, being the man of honour that you are, you would wish to pay your old gambling debts."

"Oh! yes, I should pay if I could," answered Adrian with a yawn. "But it seems hardly worth while talking about, does it?" and he sauntered out of the place into the open air.

His father rose, and, standing by the great peat fire, watched him depart thoughtfully.

"Let me take stock of the position," he said to himself. "The dear child hasn't a farthing left; therefore, although he is getting bored, he can't run away. Moreover, he owes me more money than I ever saw; therefore, if he should chance to become the husband of the Jufvrouw Brant, and the legal owner of her parent's wealth, whatever disagreements may ensue between him and me I shall have earned my share of it in a clean and gentlemanly fashion. If, on the other hand, it should become necessary for me to marry the young lady, which God forbid, at least no harm is done, and he will have had the advantage of some valuable lessons from the most accomplished card-player in Spain.

"And now what we need to enliven this detestable place is the presence of Beauty herself. Our worthy friends should be back soon—bringing their sheaves with them, let us hope, for otherwise matters will be complicated. Let me see: have I thought of everything, for in such affairs one oversight—He is a Catholic, therefore, can contract a legal marriage under the Proclamations—it was lucky I remembered that point of law, though it nearly cost us all our lives—and the priest, I can lay my hands on him, a discreet man, who won't hear if the lady says No, but filled beyond a question with the power and virtue of his holy office. No, I have nothing to reproach myself with in the way of precaution, nothing at all. I have sown the seed well and truly, it remains only for Providence to give the increase, or shall I say—no, I think not, for between the general and the private familiarity is always

odious. Well, it is time that you met with a little success and settled down, for you have worked hard, Juan, my friend, and you are getting old—yes, Juan, you are getting old. Bah! what a hole and what weather!" and Montalvo established himself by the fireside to doze away his *ennui*.

When Adrian shut the door behind him the late November day was drawing to its close, and between the rifts in the sullen snow clouds now and again an arrow from the westering sun struck upon the tall, skeleton-like sails of the mill, through which the wind rushed with a screaming noise. Adrian had intended to walk on the marsh, but finding it too sodden, he crossed the western dyke by means of a board laid from bank to bank, and struck into the sand-dunes beyond. Even in the summer, when the air was still and flowers bloomed and larks sang, these dunes were fantastic and almost unnatural in appearance, with their deep, wind-scooped hollows of pallid sand, their sharp angles, miniature cliffs, and their crests crowned with coarse grasses. But now, beneath the dull pall of the winter sky, no spot in the world could have been more lonesome or more desolate, for never a sign of man was to be seen upon them and save for a solitary curlew, whose sad note reached Adrian's ears as it beat up wind from the sea, even the beasts and birds that dwelt there had hidden themselves away. Only the voices of Nature remained in all their majesty, the drear screams and moan of the rushing wind, and above it, now low and now voluminous as the gale veered, the deep and constant roar of the ocean.

Adrian reached the highest crest of the ridge, whence the sea, hidden hitherto, became suddenly visible, a vast, slate-coloured expanse, twisted here and there into heaps, hollowed here and there into valleys, and broken everywhere with angry lines and areas of white. In such trouble, for, after its own fashion, his heart was troubled, some temperaments might have found a kind of consolation in this

sight, for while we witness them, at any rate, the throes and moods of Nature in their greatness declare a mastery of our senses, and stun or hush to silence the petty turmoil of our souls. This, at least, is so with those who have eyes to read the lesson written on Nature's face, and ears to hear the message which day by day she delivers with her lips; gifts given only to such as hold the cypher-key of imagination, and pray for grace to use it.

In Adrian's case, however, the weirdness of the sand-hills and the grandeur of the seascape with the bitter wind that blew between and the solitude which brooded over all, served only to exasperate nerves that already were strained well nigh to breaking.

Why had his father brought him to this hideous swamp bordered by a sailless sea? To save their lives from the fury of the mob? This he understood, but there was more in it than that, some plot which he did not understand, and which the ruffian, Hague Simon, and that she-fiend, his companion, had gone away to execute. Meanwhile he must sit here day after day playing cards with the wretch Ramiro, whom, for no fault of his own, God had chosen out to be his parent. By the way, why was the man so fond of playing cards? And what was the meaning of all that nonsense about notes of hand? Yes, here he must sit, and for company he had the sense of his unalterable shame, the memory of his mother's face as she spurned and rejected him, the vision of the woman whom he loved and had lost, and—the ghost of Dirk van Goorl.

He shivered as he thought of it; yes, his hair lifted and his lip twitched involuntarily, for to Adrian's racked nerves and distorted vision this ghost of the good man whom he had betrayed was no child of phantasy. He had woken in the night and seen it standing at his bedside, plague-defiled and hunger-wasted, and because of it he dreaded to sleep alone, especially in that creaking, rat-haunted mill, whose

every board seemed charged with some tale of death and blood. Heavens! At this very moment he thought he could hear that dead voice calling down the gale. No, it must be the curlew, but at least he would be going home. Home—that place home—with not even a priest near to confess to and be comforted!

Thanks be to the Saints! the wind had dropped a little, but now in place of it came the snow, dense, whirling, white; so dense indeed that he could scarcely see his path. What an end that would be, to be frozen to death in the snow on these sand-hills while the spirit of Dirk van Goorl sat near and watched him die with those hollow, hungry eyes. The sweat came upon Adrian's forehead at the thought, and he broke into a run, heading for the bank of the great dyke that pierced the dunes half a mile or so away, which bank must, he knew, lead him to the mill. He reached it and trudged along what had been the tow-path, though now it was overgrown with weeds and rushes. It was not a pleasant journey, for the twilight had closed in with speed and the thick flakes, that seemed to leap into his face and sting him, turned it into a darkness mottled with faint white. Still he stumbled forward with bent head and close-wrapped cloak till he judged that he must be near to the mill, and halted staring through the gloom.

Just then the snow ceased for a while and light crept back to the cold face of the earth, showing Adrian that he had done well to halt. In front of where he stood, within a few paces of his feet indeed, for a distance of quite twenty yards the lower part of the bank had slipped away, washed from the stone core with which it was faced at this point, by a slow and neglected percolation of water. Had he walked on therefore, he would have fallen his own height or more into a slough of mud, whence he might, or might not have been able to extricate himself. As it was, how-

ever, by such light as remained he could crawl upon the coping of the stonework which was still held in place with old struts of timber that, until they had been denuded by the slow and constant leakage, were buried and supported in the vanished earthwork. It was not a pleasant bridge, for to the right lay the mud-bottomed gulf, and to the left, almost level with his feet, were the black and peaty waters of the rain-fed dyke pouring onwards to the sea.

"Next flood this will go," thought Adrian to himself, "and then the marsh must become a mere which will be bad for whomever happens to be living in the Red Mill." He was on firm ground again now, and there, looming tall and spectral against the gloom, not five hundred yards away, rose the gaunt sails of the mill. To reach it he walked on six score paces or more to the little landing-quay, whence a raised path ran to the building. As he drew near to it he was astonished to hear the rattle of oars working in rollocks and a man's voice say:

"Steady, here is the place, praise the Saints! Now, then, out passengers and let us be gone."

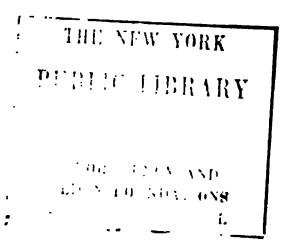
Adrian, whom events had made timid, drew beneath the shadow of the bank and watched, while from the dim outline of the boat arose three figures, or rather two figures arose, dragging the third between them.

"Hold her," said a voice that seemed familiar, "while I give these men their hire," and there followed a noise of clinking coin, mingled with some oaths and grumbling about the weather and the distance, which were abated with more coin. Then again the oars rattled and the boat was pushed off, whereon a sweet voice cried in agonised tones:

"Sirs, you who have wives and daughters, will you leave me in the hands of these wretches? In the name of God take pity upon my helplessness."

"It is a shame, and she so fair a maid," grumbled an-




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THE WHITE AND TERRIFIED FACE OF—ELSA BRANT

other thick and raucous voice, but the steersman cried, "Mind your business, Marsh Jan. We have done our job and got our pay, so leave the gentry to settle their own love affairs. Good night to you, passengers; give way, give way," and the boat swung round and vanished into the gloom.

For a moment Adrian's heart stood still; then he sprang forward to see before him Hague Simon, the Butcher, Black Meg his wife, and between them a bundle wrapped in shawls.

"What is this?" he asked.

"You ought to know, Heer Adrian," answered Black Meg with a chuckle, "seeing that this charming piece of goods has been brought all the way from Leyden, regardless of expense, for your especial benefit."

The bundle lifted its head, and the faint light shone upon the white and terrified face of—Elsa Brant.

"May God reward you for this evil deed, Adrian, called van Goorl," said the pitiful voice.

"This deed! What deed?" he stammered in answer. "I know nothing of it, Elsa Brant."

"You know nothing of it? Yet it was done in your name, and you are here to receive me, who was kidnapped as I walked outside Leyden to be dragged hither with force by these monsters. Oh! have you no heart and no fear of judgment that you can speak thus?"

"Free her," roared Adrian, rushing at the Butcher to see a knife gleaming in his hand and another in that of Black Meg.

"Stop your nonsense, Master Adrian, and stand back. If you have anything to say, say it to your father, the Count. Come, let us pass, for we are cold and weary," and taking Elsa by the elbows they brushed past him, nor, indeed, even had he not been too bewildered to interfere, could Adrian have stayed them, for he was unarmed. Be-

sides, where would be the use, seeing that the boat had gone and that they were alone on a winter's night in the wind-swept wilderness, with no refuge for miles save such as the mill house could afford. So Adrian bent his head, for the snow had begun to fall again, and, sick at heart, followed them along the path. Now he understood at length why they had come to the Red Mill.

Simon opened the door and entered, but Elsa hung back at its ill-omened threshold. She even tried to struggle a little, poor girl, whereon the ruffian in front jerked her towards him with an oath, so that she caught her foot and fell upon her face. This was too much for Adrian. Springing forward he struck the Butcher full in the mouth with his fist, and next moment they were rolling over and over each other upon the floor, struggling fiercely for the knife which Simon held.

During all her life Elsa never forgot that scene. Behind her the howling blackness of the night and the open door, through which flake by flake the snow leapt into the light. In front the large round room, fashioned from the basement of the mill, lit only by the great fire of turfs and a single horn lantern, hung from the ceiling that was ribbed with beams of black and massive oak. And there, in this forbidding, naked-looking place, that rocked and quivered as the gale caught the tall arms of the mill above, seated by the hearth in a rude chair of wood and sleeping, one man, Ramiro, the Spanish sleuth-hound, who had hunted down her father, he whom above every other she held in horror and in hate; and two, Adrian and the spy, at death-grips on the floor, between them the sheen of a naked knife.

Such was the picture.

Ramiro awoke at the noise, and there was fear on his face as though some ill dream lingered in his brain. Next instant he saw and understood.

"I will run the man through who strikes another blow,"

he said, in a cold clear voice as he drew his sword. "Stand up, you fools, and tell me what this means."

"It means that this brute beast but now threw Elsa Brant upon her face," gasped Adrian as he rose, "and I punished him."

"It is a lie," hissed the other; "I pulled the minx on, that is all, and so would you have done, if you had been cursed with such a wild-cat for four-and-twenty hours. Why, when we took her she was more trouble to hold than any man."

"Oh! I understand," interrupted Ramiro, who had recovered his composure; "a little maidenly reluctance, that is all, my worthy Simon, and as for this young gentleman, a little lover-like anxiety—doubtless in bygone years you have felt the same," and he glanced mockingly at Black Meg. "So do not be too ready to take offence, good Simon. Youth will be youth."

"And Youth will get a knife between its ribs if it is not careful," grumbled Hague Simon, as he spat out a piece of broken tooth.

"Why am I brought here, Señor," broke in Elsa, "in defiance of laws and justice?"

"Laws! Mejufvrouw, I did not know that there were any left in the Netherlands; justice! well, all is fair in love and war, as any lady will admit. And the reason why—I think you must ask Adrian, he knows more about it than I do."

"He says that he knows nothing, Señor."

"Does he, the rogue? Does he indeed? Well, it would be rude to contradict him, wouldn't it, so I for one unreservedly accept his statement that he knows nothing, and I advise you to do the same. No, no, my boy, do not trouble to explain, we all quite understand. Now, my good dame," he went on addressing the serving-woman who had entered the place, "take this young lady to the best

room you have above. And, listen, both of you, she is to be treated with all kindness, do you hear, for if any harm comes to her, either at your hands or her own, by Heaven! you shall pay for it to the last drop of your blood. Now, no excuses and—no mistakes."

The two women, Meg and the other, nodded and motioned to Elsa to accompany them. She considered a moment, looking first at Ramiro and next at Adrian. Then her head dropped upon her breast, and turning without a word she followed them up the creaking oaken stair that rose from a niche near the wall of the ingle-nook.

"Father," said Adrian when the massive door had closed behind her and they were left alone—"father—for I suppose that I must call you so."

"There is not the slightest necessity," broke in Ramiro; "facts, my dear son, need not always be paraded in the cold light of day—fortunately. But, proceed."

"What does all this mean?"

"I wish I could tell you. It appears to mean, however, that without any effort upon your part, for you seem to me a young man singularly devoid of resource, your love affairs are prospering beyond expectation."

"I have had nothing to do with the business; I wash my hands of it."

"That is as well. Some sensitive people might think they need a deal of washing. You young fool," he went on, dropping his mocking manner, "listen to me. You are in love with this pink and white piece of goods, and I have brought her here for you to marry."

"And I refuse to marry her against her will."

"As to that you can please yourself. But somebody has got to marry her—you, or I."

"You—*you!*" gasped Adrian.

"Quite so. The adventure is not one, to be frank, that attracts me. At my age memories are sufficient. But

material interests must be attended to, so if you decline —well, I am still eligible and hearty. Do you see the point?"

"No, what is it?"

"It is a sound title to the inheritance of the departed Hendrik Brant. That wealth we might, it is true, obtain by artifice or by arms; but how much better that it should come into the family in a regular fashion, thereby ousting the claim of the Crown. Things in this country are disturbed at present, but they will not always be disturbed, for in the end somebody must give way and order will prevail. Then questions might be asked, for persons in possession of great riches are always the mark of envy. But if the heiress is married to a good Catholic and loyal subject of the king, who can cavil at rights sanctified by the laws of God and man? Think it over, my dear Adrian, think it over. Step-mother or wife—you can take your choice."

With impotent rage, with turmoil of heart and torment of conscience, Adrian did think it over. All that night he thought, tossing on his rat-haunted pallet, while without the snow whirled and the wind beat. If he did not marry Elsa, his father would, and there could be no doubt as to which of these alternatives would be best and happiest for her. Elsa married to that wicked, cynical, devil-possessed, battered, fortune-hunting adventurer with a nameless past! This must be prevented at any cost. With his father her lot *must* be a hell; with himself—after a period of storm and doubt perhaps—it could scarcely be other than happy, for was he not young, handsome, sympathetic, and—devoted? Ah! there was the real point. He loved this lady with all the earnestness of which his nature was capable, and the thought of her passing into the possession of another man gave him the acutest anguish. That the man should be Foy, his half-brother, was bad enough; that it should be Ramiro, his father, was insupportable.

At breakfast the following morning, when Elsa did not appear, the pair met.

"You look pale, Adrian," said his father presently. "I fear that this wild weather kept you awake last night, as it did me, although at your age I have slept through the roar of a battle. Well, have you thought over our conversation? I do not wish to trouble you with these incessant family matters, but time presses, and it is necessary to decide."

Adrian looked out of the lattice at the snow, which fell and fell without pause. Then he turned and said:

"Yes. Of the two it is best that she should marry me, though I think that such a crime will bring its own reward."

"Wise young man," answered his father. "Under all your cloakings of vagary I observe that you have a foundation of common-sense, just as the giddiest weathercock is bedded on a stone. As for the reward, considered properly it seems to be one upon which I can heartily congratulate you."

"Peace to that talk," said Adrian, angrily; "you forget that there are two parties to such a contract; her consent must be gained, and I will not ask it."

"No? Then I will; a few arguments occur to me. Now look here, friend, we have struck a bargain, and you will be so good as to keep it or to take the consequences—oh! never mind what they are. I will bring this lady to the altar—or, rather, to that table, and you will marry her, after which you can settle matters just exactly as you please; live with her as your wife, or make your bow and walk away, which, I care nothing so long as you are married. Now I am weary of all this talk, so be so good as to leave me in peace on the subject."

Adrian looked at him, opened his lips to speak, then

changed his mind and marched out of the house into the blinding snow.

"Thank Heaven he is gone at last!" reflected his father, and called for Hague Simon, with whom he held a long and careful interview.

"You understand?" he ended.

"I understand," answered Simon, sulkily. "I am to find this priest, who should be waiting at the place you name, and to bring him here by nightfall to-morrow, which is a rough job for a Christian man in such weather as this."

"The pay, friend Simon, remember the pay."

"Oh! yes, it all sounds well enough, but I should like something on account."

"You shall have it—is not such a labourer worthy of his hire?" replied his employer with enthusiasm, and producing from his pocket the purse which Lysbeth had given Adrian, with a smile of peculiar satisfaction, for really the thing had a comic side, he counted a handsome sum into the hand of this emissary of Venus.

Simon looked at the money, concluded, after some reflection, that it would scarcely do to stand out for more at present, pouched it, and having wrapped himself in a thick frieze coat, opened the door and vanished into the falling snow.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE BRIDE

THE day passed, and through every hour of it the snow fell incessantly. Night came, and it was still falling in large, soft flakes that floated to the earth gently as thistle-down, for now there was no wind. Adrian met his father at meals only; the rest of the day he preferred to spend out of doors in the snow, or hanging about the old sheds at the back of the mill, rather than endure the society of this terrible man; this man of mocking words and iron purpose, who was forcing him into the commission of a great crime.

It was at breakfast on the following morning that Ramiro inquired of Black Meg whether the Jufvrouw Brant had sufficiently recovered from the fatigues of her journey to honour them with her presence. The woman replied that she absolutely refused to leave her room, or even to speak more than was necessary.

"Then," said Ramiro, "as it is important that I should have a few words with her, be so good as to tell the young lady, with my homage, that I will do myself the honour of waiting on her in the course of the forenoon."

Meg departed on her errand, and Adrian looked up suspiciously.

"Calm yourself, young friend," said his father, "although the interview will be private, you have really no cause for jealousy. At present, remember, I am but the second string in the bow-case, the understudy who has learnt the part, a humble position, but one which may prove useful."

At all of which gibes Adrian winced. But he did not

reply, for by now he had learned that he was no match for his father's bitter wit.

Elsa received the message as she received everything else, in silence.

Three days before, as after a fearful illness during which on several occasions she was at the very doors of death, Lysbeth van Goorl had been declared out of danger, Elsa, her nurse, ventured to leave her for a few hours. That evening the town seemed to stifle her and, feeling that she needed the air of the country, she passed the Morsch poort and walked a little way along the banks of the canal, never noticing, poor girl, that her footsteps were dogged. When it began to grow dusk, she halted and stood a while gazing towards the Haarlemer Meer, letting her heart go out to the lover who, as she thought and hoped, within a day or two would be at her side.

Then it was that something was thrown over her head, and for a while all was black. She awoke to find herself lying in a boat, and watching her, two wretches, whom she recognised as those who had assailed her when first she came to Leyden from The Hague.

"Why have you kidnapped me, and where am I going?" she asked.

"Because we are paid to do it, and you are going to Adrian van Goorl," was the answer.

Then she understood, and was silent.

Thus they brought her to this lonesome, murderous-looking place, where sure enough Adrian was waiting for her, waiting with a lie upon his lips. Now, doubtless, the end was at hand. She, who loved his brother with all her heart and soul, was to be given forcibly in marriage to a man whom she despised and loathed, the vain, furious-tempered traitor, who, for revenge, jealousy, or greed, she knew not which, had not hesitated to send his benefactor, and mother's husband, to perish in the fires of the Inquisition.

What was she to do? Escape seemed out of the question, imprisoned as she was on the third story of a lofty mill standing in a lonely, snow-shrouded wilderness, cut off from the sight of every friendly face, and spied on hour after hour by two fierce-eyed women. No, there was only one escape for her—through the gate of death. Even this would be difficult, for she had no weapon, and day and night the women kept guard over her, one standing sentinel, while the other slept. Moreover, she had no mind to die, being young and healthy, with a love to live for, and from her childhood up she had been taught that self-slaughter is a sin. No, she would trust in God, and overwhelming though it was, fight her way through this trouble as best she might. The helpless find friends sometimes. Therefore, that her strength might be preserved, Elsa rested and ate of her food, and drank the wine which they brought to her, refusing to leave the room, or to speak more than she was obliged, but watching everything that passed.

On the second morning of her imprisonment Ramiro's message reached her, to which, as usual, she made no answer. In due course also Ramiro himself arrived, and stood bowing in the doorway.

"Have I your permission to enter, Jufvrouw?" he asked. Then Elsa, knowing that the moment of trial had come, steeled herself for the encounter.

"You are master here," she answered, in a voice cold as the falling snow without, "why then do you mock me?"

He motioned to the women to leave the room, and when they had gone, replied:

"I have little thought of such a thing, lady; the matter in hand is too serious for smart sayings," and with another bow he sat himself down on a chair near the hearth, where a fire was burning. Thereon Elsa rose and stood over against him, for upon her feet she seemed to feel stronger.

"Will you be so good as to set out this matter, Señor Ramiro? Am I brought here to be tried for heresy?"

"Even so, for heresy against the god of love, and the sentence of the Court is that you must expiate your sin, not at the stake, but at the altar."

"I do not understand."

"Then I will explain. My son Adrian, a worthy young man on the whole—you know that he *is* my son, do you not?—has had the misfortune, or I should say the good fortune, to fall earnestly in love with you, whereas you have the bad taste—or, perhaps, the good taste—to give your affections elsewhere. Under the circumstances, Adrian, being a youth of spirit and resource, has fallen back upon primitive methods in order to bring his suit to a successful conclusion. He is here, you are here, and this evening I understand that the priest will be here. I need not dwell upon the obvious issue; indeed, it is a private matter upon which I have no right to intrude, except, of course, as a relative and a well-wisher."

Elsa made an impatient movement with her hand, as though to brush aside all this web of words.

"Why do you take so much trouble to force an unhappy girl into a hateful marriage?" she asked. "How can such a thing advantage you?"

"Ah!" answered Ramiro briskly, "I perceive I have to do with a woman of business, one who has that rarest of gifts—common sense. I will be frank. Your esteemed father died possessed of a very large fortune, which to-day is your property as his sole issue and heiress. Under the marriage laws, which I myself think unjust, that fortune will pass into the power of any husband whom you choose to take. Therefore, so soon as you are made his wife it will pass to Adrian. I am Adrian's father, and, as it happens, he is pecuniarily indebted to me to a considerable amount, so that, in the upshot, as he himself has pointed

out more than once, this alliance will provide for both of us. But business details are wearisome, so I need not enlarge."

"The fortune you speak of, Señor Ramiro, is lost."

"It is lost, but I have reason to hope that it will be found."

"You mean that this is purely a matter of money?"

"So far as I am concerned, purely. For Adrian's feelings I cannot speak, since who knows the mystery of another's heart?"

"Then, if the money were forthcoming—or a clue to it—there need be no marriage?"

"So far as I am concerned, none at all."

"And if the money is not forthcoming, and I refuse to marry the Heer Adrian, or he to marry me—what then?"

"That is a riddle, but I think I see an answer at any rate to half of it. Then the marriage would still take place, but with another bridegroom."

"Another bridegroom! Who?"

"Your humble and devoted adorer."

Elsa shuddered and recoiled a step.

"Ah!" he said, "I should not have bowed, you saw my white hairs—to the young a hateful sight."

Elsa's indignation rose, and she answered:

"It is not your white hair that I shrink from, Señor, which in some would be a crown of honour, but——"

"In my case suggests to you other reflections. Be gentle and spare me them. In a world of rough actions, what need to emphasise them with rough words?"

For a few minutes there was silence, which Ramiro, glancing out of the lattice, broke by remarking that "the snowfall was extraordinarily heavy for the time of year." Then followed another silence.

"I understood you just now, dear lady, to make some sort of suggestion which might lead to an arrangement sat-

isfactory to both of us. The exact locality of this wealth is at present obscure—you mentioned some clue. Are you in a position to furnish such a clue?"

"If I am in a position, what then?"

"Then, perhaps, after a few days visit to an interesting, but little explored part of Holland, you might return to your friends as you left them—in short as a single woman."

A struggle shook Elsa, and do what she would some trace of it appeared in her face.

"Will you swear that?" she whispered.

"Most certainly."

"Do you swear before God that if you have this clue you will not force me into a marriage with the Heer Adrian, or with yourself—that you will let me go, unharmed?"

"I swear it—before God."

"Knowing that God will be revenged upon you if you break the oath, you still swear?"

"I still swear. Why these needless repetitions?"

"Then—then," and she leant towards him, speaking in a hoarse whisper, "believing that you, even you, will not dare to be false to such an oath, for you, even you, must fear death, a miserable death, and vengeance, eternal vengeance, I give you the clue: It lies in the hilt of the sword Silence."

"The sword Silence? What sword is that?"

"The great sword of Red Martin."

Stirred out of his self-control Ramiro struck his hand upon his knee.

"And to think," he said, "that for over twelve hours I had it hanging on the wall of the Gevangenhuis! Well, I fear that I must ask you to be more explicit. Where is this sword?"

"Wherever Red Martin is, that is all I know. I can tell you no more; the plan of the hiding-place is there."

"Or was there. Well, I believe you, but to win a secret

from the hilt of the sword of the man who broke his way out of the torture-chamber of the Gevangenhuis, is a labour that would have been not unworthy of Hercules. First, Red Martin must be found, then his sword must be taken, which, I think, will cost men their lives. Dear lady, I am obliged for your information, but I fear that the marriage must still go through."

"You swore, you swore," she gasped, "you swore before God!"

"Quite so, and I shall leave—the Power you refer to—to manage the matter. Doubtless He can attend to His own affairs—I must attend to mine. I hope that about seven o'clock this evening will suit you, by which time the priest and—a bridegroom will be ready."

Then Elsa broke down.

"Devil!" she cried in the torment of her despair. "To save my honour I have betrayed my father's trust; I have betrayed the secret for which Martin was ready to die by torment, and given him over to be hunted like a wild beast. Oh! God forgive me, and God help me!"

"Doubtless, dear young lady, He will do the first, for your temptations were really considerable; I, who have more experience, outwitted you, that was all. Possibly, also, He may do the second, though many have uttered that cry unheard. For my own sake, I trust that He was sleeping when you uttered yours. But it is your affair and His; I leave it to be arranged between you. Till this evening, Jufvrouw," and he bowed himself from the room.

But Elsa, shamed and broken-hearted, threw herself upon the bed and wept.

At mid-day she arose, hearing upon the stair the step of the woman who brought her food, and to hide her tear-stained face went to the barred lattice and looked out. The scene was dismal indeed, for the wind had veered suddenly, the snow had ceased, and in place of it rain was fall-

ing with a steady persistence. When the woman had gone, Elsa washed her face, and although her appetite turned from it, ate of the food, knowing how necessary it was that she should keep her strength.

Another hour passed, and there came a knock on the door. Elsa shuddered, for she thought that Ramiro had returned to torment her. Indeed it was almost a relief when, instead of him, appeared his son. One glance at Adrian's nervous, shaken face, yes, and even the sound of his uncertain step brought hope to her heart. Her woman's instinct told her that now she had no longer to do with the merciless and terrible Ramiro, to whose eyes she was but a pretty pawn in a game that he must win, but with a young man who loved her, and whom she held, therefore, at a disadvantage—with one, moreover, who was harassed and ashamed, and upon whose conscience, therefore, she might work. She turned upon him, drawing herself up, and although she was short and Adrian tall, of a sudden he felt as though she towered over him.

"Your pleasure?" said Elsa.

In the old days Adrian would have answered with some magnificent compliment, or far-fetched simile lifted from the pages of romancers. In truth he had thought of several such while, like a half-starved dog seeking a home, he wandered round and round the mill-house in the snow. But he was now far beyond all rhetoric or gallantries.

"My father wished," he began humbly—"I mean that I have come to speak to you about—our marriage."

Of a sudden Elsa's delicate features seemed to turn to ice, while, to his fancy at any rate, her brown eyes became fire.

"Marriage," she said in a strange voice. "Oh! what an unutterable coward you must be to speak that word. Call what is proposed by any foul title which you will, but at least leave the holy name of marriage undefiled."

"It is not my fault," he answered sullenly, but shrinking beneath her words. "You know, Elsa, that I wished to wed you honourably enough."

"Yes," she broke in, "and because I would not listen, because you do not please me, and you could not win me as a man wins a maid, you—you laid a trap and kidnapped me, thinking to get by brute force that which my heart withheld. Oh! in all the Netherlands lives there another such an abject as Adrian called van Goorl, the base-born son of Ramiro the galley slave?"

"I have told you that it is false," he replied furiously. "I had nothing to do with your capture. I knew nothing of it till I saw you here."

Elsa laughed a very bitter laugh. "Spare your breath," she said, "for if you swore it before the face of the recording Angel I would not believe you. Remember that you are the man who betrayed your brother and your benefactor, and then guess, if you can, what worth I put upon your words."

In the bitterness of his heart Adrian groaned aloud, and from that groan Elsa, listening eagerly, gathered some kind of hope.

"Surely," she went on, with a changed and softened manner, "surely you will not do this wickedness. The blood of Dirk van Goorl lies on your head; will you add mine to his? For be sure of this, I swear it by my Maker, that before I am indeed a wife to you I shall be dead—or mayhap you will be dead, or both of us. Do you understand?"

"I understand, but——"

"But what? Where is the use of this wickedness? For your soul's sake, refuse to have aught to do with such a sin."

"But if so, my father will marry you."

It was a chance arrow, but it went home, for of a sudden Elsa's strength and eloquence seemed to leave her. She

ran to him with her hands clasped, she flung herself upon her knees.

"Oh! help me to escape," she moaned, "and I will bless you all my life."

"It is impossible," he answered. "Escape from this guarded place, through those leagues of melting snow? I tell you that it is impossible."

"Then," and her eyes grew wild, "then kill him and free me. He is a devil, he is your evil genius; it would be a righteous deed. Kill him and free me."

"I should like to," answered Adrian; "I nearly did once, but, for my soul's sake, I can't put a sword through my own father; it is the most horrible of crimes. When I confessed——"

"Then," she broke in, "if this farce, this infamy must be gone through, swear at least that you will treat it as such, that you will respect me."

"It is a hard thing to ask of a husband who loves you more than any woman in the world," he answered turning aside his head.

"Remember," she went on, with another flash of defiant spirit, "that if you do not, you will soon love me better than any woman out of the world, or perhaps we shall both settle what lies between us before the Judgment Seat of God. Will you swear?"

He hesitated.

Oh! she reflected, what if he should answer—"Rather than this I hand you over to Ramiro"? What if he should think of that argument? Happily for her, at the moment he did not.

"Swear," she implored, "swear," clinging with her hands to the lappet of his coat and lifting to him her white and piteous face.

"I make it an offering in expiation of my sins," he groaned, "you shall go free of me."

Elsa uttered a sigh of relief. She put no faith whatever in Adrian's promises, but at the worst it would give her time.

"I thought that I should not appeal in vain——"

"To so amusing and egregious a donkey," said Ramiro's mocking voice speaking from the gloom of the doorway, which now Elsa observed for the first time had swung open mysteriously.

"My dear son and daughter-in-law, how can I thank you sufficiently for the entertainment with which you have enlivened one of the most dreary afternoons I remember. Don't look dangerous, my boy; recall what you have just told this young lady, that the crime of removing a parent is one which, though agreeable, is not lightly to be indulged. Then, as to your future arrangements, how touching! The soul of a Diana, I declare, and the self-sacrifice of a—no, I fear that the heroes of antiquity can furnish no suitable example. And now, adieu, I go to welcome the gentleman you both of you so eagerly expect."

He went, and a minute later without speaking, for the situation seemed beyond words, Adrian crept down the stairs after him, more miserable and crushed even than he had crept up them half an hour before.

Another two hours went by. Elsa was in her apartment with Black Meg for company, who watched her as a cat watches a mouse in a trap. Adrian had taken refuge in the place where he slept above. It was a dreary, vacuous chamber, that once had held stones and other machinery of the mill now removed, the home of spiders and half-starved rats, that a lean black cat hunted continually. Across its ceiling ran great beams, whereof the interlacing ends, among which sharp draughts whistled, lost themselves in gloom, while, with an endless and exasperating sound, as of a knuckle knocked upon a board, the water dripped from the leaky roof.

In the round living-chamber below Ramiro was alone. No lamp had been lit, but the glow from the great turf fire played upon his face as he sat there, watching, waiting, and scheming in the chair of black oak. Presently a noise from without caught his quick ear, and calling to the serving woman to light the lamp, he went to the door, opened it, and saw a lantern floating towards him through the thick steam of falling rain. Another minute and the bearer of the lantern, Hague Simon, arrived, followed by two other men.

"Here he is," said Simon, nodding at the figure behind him, a short round figure wrapped in a thick frieze cloak, from which water ran. "The other is the head boatman."

"Good," said Ramiro. "Tell him and his companions to wait in the shed without, where liquor will be sent to them; they may be wanted later on."

Then followed talk and oaths, and at length the man retreated grumbling.

"Enter, Father Thomas," said Ramiro; "you have had a wet journey, I fear. Enter and give us your blessing."

Before he answered the priest threw off his dripping, hooded cape of Frisian cloth, revealing a coarse, wicked face, red and blear-eyed from intemperance.

"My blessing?" he said in a raucous voice. "Here it is, Señor Ramiro, or whatever you call yourself now. Curse you all for bringing out a holy priest upon one of your devil's errands in weather which is only fit for a bald-headed coot to travel through. There is going to be a flood; already the water is running over the banks of the dam, and it gathers every moment as the snow melts. I tell you there is going to be such a flood as we have not seen for years."

"The more reason, Father, for getting through this little business quickly; but first you will wish for something to drink."

Father Thomas nodded, and Ramiro filling a small mug with brandy, gave it to him. He gulped it off.

"Another," he said. "Don't be afraid. A chosen vessel should also be a seasoned vessel; at any rate this one is. Ah! that's better. Now then, what's the exact job?"

Ramiro took him apart and they talked together for a while.

"Very good," said the priest at length. "I will take the risk and do it, for where heretics are concerned such things are not too closely inquired into nowadays. But first down with the money; no paper or promises, if you please."

"Ah! you churchmen," said Ramiro, with a faint smile, "in things spiritual or temporal how much have we poor laity to learn of you!" With a sigh he produced the required sum, then paused and added, "No; with your leave we will see the papers first. You have them with you?"

"Here they are," answered the priest, drawing some documents from his pocket. "But they haven't been married yet; the rule is, marry first, then certify. Until the ceremony is actually performed, anything might happen, you know."

"Quite so, Father. Anything might happen either before or after; but still, with your leave, I think that in this case we may as well certify first; you might want to be getting away, and it will save so much trouble later. Will you be so kind as to write your certificate?"

Father Thomas hesitated, while Ramiro gently clinked the gold coins in his hand and murmured,

"I should be sorry to think, Father, that you had taken such a rough journey for nothing."

"What trick are you at now?" growled the priest. "Well, after all it is a mere form. Give me the names."

Ramiro gave them; Father Thomas scrawled them down, adding some words and his own signature, then said,

"There you are, that will hold good against anyone except the Pope."

"A mere form," repeated Ramiro, "of course. But the world attaches so much importance to forms, so I think that we will have this one witnessed—No, not by myself, who am an interested party—by someone independent," and calling Hague Simon and the waiting-woman he bade them set their names at the foot of the documents.

"Papers signed in advance—fees paid in advance!" he went on, handing over the money, "and now, just one more glass to drink the health of the bride and bridegroom, also in advance. You will not refuse, nor you, worthy Simon, nor you, most excellent Abigail. Ah! I thought not, the night is cold."

"And the brandy strong," muttered the priest thickly, as this third dose of raw spirit took effect upon him. "Now get on with the business, for I want to be out of this hole before the flood comes."

"Quite so. Friends, will you be so good as to summon my son and the lady? The lady first, I think—and all three of you might go to escort her. Brides sometimes consider it right to fain a slight reluctance—you understand? On second thoughts, you need not trouble the Señor Adrian. I have a few words of ante-nuptial advice to offer, so I will go to him."

A minute later father and son stood face to face. Adrian leaped up; he shook his fist, he raved and stormed at the cold, impassive man before him.

"You fool, you contemptible fool!" said Ramiro when he had done. "Heavens! to think that such a creature should have sprung from me, a human jackass only fit to bear the blows and burdens of others, to fill the field with empty brayings, and wear himself out by kicking at the air. Oh! don't twist up your face at me, for I am your master as well as your father, however much you may hate

me. You are mine, body and soul, don't you understand; a bond-slave, nothing more. You lost the only chance you ever had in the game when you got me down at Leyden. You daren't draw a sword on me again for your soul's sake, dear Adrian, for your soul's sake; and if you dared, I would run you through. Now, are you coming?"

"No," answered Adrian.

"Think a minute. If you don't marry her I shall, and before she is half an hour older; also—" and he leant forward and whispered into his son's ear.

"Oh! you devil, you devil!" Adrian gasped; then he moved towards the door.

"What? Changed your mind, have you, Mr. Weathercock? Well, it is the prerogative of all feminine natures—but, your doublet is awry, and allow me to suggest that you should brush your hair. There, that's better; now, come on. No, you go first, if you please, I'd rather have you in front of me."

When they reached the room below the bride was already there. Gripped on either side by Black Meg and the other woman, white as death and trembling, but still defiant, stood Elsa.

"Let's get through with this," growled the half-drunken, ruffian priest. "I take the willingness of the parties for granted."

"I am not willing," cried Elsa. "I have been brought here by force. I call everyone present to witness that whatever is done is against my will. I appeal to God to help me."

The priest turned upon Ramiro.

"How am I to marry them in the face of this?" he asked. "If only she were silent it might be done——"

"The difficulty has occurred to me," answered Ramiro. He made a sign, whereon Simon seized Elsa's wrists, and Black Meg, slipping behind her, deftly fastened a handker-





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chief over her mouth in such fashion that she was gagged, but could still breathe through the nostrils.

Elsa struggled a little, then was quiet, and turned her piteous eyes on Adrian, who stepped forward and opened his lips.

"You remember the alternative," said his father in a low voice, and he stopped.

"I suppose," broke in Father Thomas, "that we may at any rate reckon upon the consent, or at least upon the silence of the Heer bridegroom."

"You may reckon on his silence, Father Thomas," replied Ramiro.

Then the ceremony began. They dragged Elsa to the table. Thrice she flung herself to the ground, and thrice they lifted her to her feet, but at length, weary of the weight of her body, suffered her to rest upon her knees, where she remained as though in prayer, gagged like some victim on the scaffold. It was a strange and brutal scene, and every detail of it burned itself into Adrian's mind. The round, rude room, with its glowing fire of turfs and its rough oaken furniture, half in light and half in dense shadow, as the lamp-rays chanced to fall; the death-like, kneeling bride, with a white cloth across her tortured face; the red-chopped, hanging-lipped hedge priest gabbling from a book, his back almost turned that he might not see her attitude and struggles; the horrible, unsexed women; the flat-faced villain, Simon, grinning by the hearth; Ramiro, cynical, mocking, triumphant, and yet somewhat anxious, his one bright eye fixed in mingled contempt and amusement upon him, Adrian—those were its outlines. There was something else also that caught and oppressed his sense, a sound which at the time Adrian thought he heard in his head alone, a soft, heavy sound with a moan in it, not unlike that of the wind, which grew gradually to a dull roar.

It was over. A ring had been forced on to Elsa's unwilling hand and, until the thing was undone by some competent and authorised Court, she was in name the wife of Adrian. The handkerchief was unbound, her hands were loosed, physically, Elsa was free again, but, in that day and land of outrage, tied, as the poor girl knew well, by a chain more terrible than any that hemp or steel could fashion.

"Congratulations! Señora," muttered Father Thomas, eyeing her nervously. "I fear you felt a little faint during the service, but a sacrament——"

"Cease your mockings, you false priest," cried Elsa. "Oh! let the swift vengeance of God fall upon every one of you, and first of all upon you, false priest."

Drawing the ring from her finger, as she spoke she cast it down upon the oaken table, whence it sprang up to drop again and rattle itself to silence. Then with one tragic motion of despair, Elsa turned and fled back to her chamber.

The red face of Father Thomas went white, and his yellow teeth chattered. "A virgin's curse," he muttered, "and in her wedding hour. It is deadly, deadly!" and he crossed himself. "Misfortune always follows, and it is sometimes death—yes, by St. Thomas, death. And you, you brought me here to do this wickedness, you dog, you galley slave!"

"Father," broke in Ramiro, "you know I have warned you against it before at The Hague; sooner or later it always breaks up the nerves," and he nodded towards the flagon of spirits. "Bread and water, Father, bread and water for forty days, that is what I prescribe, and——"

As he spoke the door was burst open, and two men rushed in, their eyes starting, their very beards bristling with terror.

"Come forth!" they cried.

"What has chanced?" screamed the priest.

"The great dyke has burst—hark, hark, hark! The floods are upon you, the mill will be swept away."

God in Heaven—it was true! Now through the open doorway they heard the roar of waters, whose note Adrian had caught before, yes, and in the gloom appeared their foaming crest as they rushed through the great and ever-widening breach in the lofty dyke down upon the flooded lowland.

Father Thomas bounded through the door yelling, "The boat, the boat!" For a moment Ramiro thought, considering the situation, then he said:

"Fetch the Jufvrouw. No, not you, Adrian; she would die rather than come with you. You, Simon, and you, Meg. Swift, obey."

They departed on their errand.

"Men," went on Ramiro, "take this gentleman and lead him to the boat. Hold him if he tries to escape. I will follow with the lady. Go, you fool, go, there is not a second to be lost," and Adrian, hanging back and protesting, was dragged away by the boatmen.

Now Ramiro was alone, and though, as he had said, there was little time to spare, again for a few moments he thought deeply. His face flushed and went pale; then entered into it a great resolve. "I don't like doing it, for it is against my vow, but the chance is good. She is safely married, and at best she would be very troublesome hereafter, and might bring us to justice or the galleys since others seek her wealth," he muttered with a shiver, adding, "as for the spies, we are well rid of them and their evidence." Then, with swift resolution, stepping to the door at the foot of the stairs, Ramiro shut it and shot the great iron bolt!

He ran from the mill; the raised path was already three feet deep in water; he could scarcely make his way along it. Ah! there lay the boat. Now he was in it, and now they were flying before the crest of a huge wave. The dam of the cutting had given altogether, and fed from sea and land at once, by snow, by rain, and by the inrush of the

high tide, its waters were pouring in a measureless volume over the doomed marshes.

"Where is Elsa?" screamed Adrian.

"I don't know. I couldn't find her," answered Ramiro. "Row, row for your lives! We can take her off in the morning, and the priest too, if he won back."

At length the cold winter sun rose over the watery waste, calm enough now, for the floods were out, in places ten and fifteen feet deep. Through the mists that brooded on the face of them Ramiro and his crew groped their way back to where the Red Mill should be. It was gone!

There stood the brick walls of the bottom story rising above the flood level, but the wooden upper part had snapped before the first great wave when the bank went bodily, and afterwards been swept away by the rushing current, swept away with those within.

"What is that?" said one of the boatmen, pointing to a dark object which floated among the tangled *débris* of sere weeds and woodwork collected against the base of the mill.

They rowed to the thing. It was the body of Father Thomas, who must have missed his footing as he ran along the pathway, and fallen into deep water.

"Um!" said Ramiro, "'a virgin's curse.' Observe, friends, how the merest coincidences may give rise to superstition. Allow me," and, holding the dead man by one hand, he felt in his pockets with the other, till, with a smile of satisfaction, he found the purse containing the gold which he had paid him on the previous evening.

"Oh! Elsa, Elsa," moaned Adrian.

"Comfort yourself, my son," said Ramiro as the boat put about, leaving the dead Father Thomas bobbing up and down in the ripple; "you have indeed lost a wife whose temper gave you little prospect of happiness, but at

least I have your marriage papers duly signed and witnessed, and—you are her heir."

He did not add that he in turn was Adrian's. But Adrian thought of it, and even in the midst of his shame and misery wondered with a shiver how long he who was Ramiro's next of kin was likely to adorn this world.

Till he had something that was worth inheriting, perhaps.

CHAPTER XXVII

WHAT ELSA SAW IN THE MOONLIGHT

It will be remembered that some weeks before Elsa's forced marriage in the Red Mill, Foy, on their escape from the Gevangenhuis, had been carried upon the naked back of Martin to the shelter of Mother Martha's lair in the Haarlemer Meer. Here he lay sick many days, for the sword cut in his thigh festered so badly that at one time his life was threatened by gangrene, but, in the end, his own strength and healthy constitution, helped with Martha's simples, cured him. So soon as he was strong again, accompanied by Martin, he travelled into Leyden, which now it was safe enough for him to visit, since the Spaniards were driven from the town.

How his young heart swelled as, still limping a little and somewhat pale from recent illness, he approached the well-known house in the Bree Straat, the home that sheltered his mother and his love. Presently he would see them again, for the news had been brought to him that Lysbeth was out of danger and Elsa must still be nursing her.

Lysbeth he found indeed, turned into an old woman by grief and sore sickness, but Elsa he did not find. She had vanished. On the previous night she had gone out to take the air, and returned no more. What had become of her none could say. All the town talked of it, and his mother was half-crazed with anxiety and fear, fear of the worst.

Hither and thither they went inquiring, seeking, tracking, but no trace of Elsa could they discover. She had been seen to pass the Morsch poort; then she disappeared. For

a while Foy was mad. At length he grew calmer and began to think. Drawing from his pocket the letter which Martha had brought to him on the night of the church-burning, he re-read it in the hope of finding a clue, since it was just possible that for private reasons Elsa might have set out on some journey of her own. It was a very sweet letter, telling him of her deep joy and gratitude at his escape; of the events that had happened in the town; of the death of his father in the Gevangenhuis, and ending thus:

"Dear Foy, my betrothed, I cannot come to you because of your mother's sickness, for I am sure that it would be your wish, as it is my desire and duty, that I should stay to nurse her. Soon, however, I hope that you will be able to come to her and me. Yet, in these dreadful times who can tell what may happen? Therefore, Foy, whatever chances, I am sure you will remember that in life or in death I am yours only—yes, to you, dead or living, you dead and I living, or you living and I dead, while or wherever I have sense or memory, I will be true; through life, through death; through whatever may lie beyond our deaths, I will be true as woman may be to man. So, dear Foy, for this present fare you well until we meet again in the days to come, or after all earthly days are done with for you and me. My love be with you, the blessing of God be with you, and when you lie down at night and when you wake at morn, think of me and put up a prayer for me as your true lover Elsa does for you. Martha waits. Most loved, most dear, most desired, fare you well."

Here was no hint of any journey, so if such had been taken it must be without Elsa's own consent.

"Martin, what do you make of it?" asked Foy, staring at him with anxious, hollow eyes.

"Ramiro—Adrian—stolen away—" answered Martin.

"Why do you say that?"

"Hague Simon was seen hanging about outside the town

yesterday, and there was a strange boat upon the river. Last night the Jufvrouw went through the Morsch poort. The rest you can guess."

"Why would they take her?" asked Foy hoarsely.

"Who can tell?" said Martin shrugging his great shoulders. "Yet I see two reasons. Hendrik Brant's wealth is supposed to be hers when it can be found; therefore, being a thief, Ramiro would want her. Adrian is in love with her; therefore, being a man, of course he would want her. These seem enough, the pair being what they are."

"When I find them I will kill them both," said Foy, grinding his teeth.

"Of course, so will I, but first we have got to find them —and her, which is the same thing."

"How, Martin, how?"

"I don't know."

"Can't you think, man?"

"I am trying to, master; it's you who don't think. You talk too much. Be silent a while."

"Well," asked Foy thirty seconds later, "have you finished thinking?"

"No, master, it's no use, there is nothing to think about. We must leave this and go back to Martha. If anyone can track her out she can. Here we can learn no more."

So they returned to the Haarlemer Meer and told Martha their sad tale.

"Bide here a day or two and be patient," she said; "I will go out and search."

"Never," answered Foy, "we will come with you."

"If you choose, but it will make matters more difficult. Martin, get ready the big boat."

Two nights had gone by, and it was an hour or more past noon on the third day, the day of Elsa's forced marriage.

The snow had ceased falling and the rain had come instead, rain, pitiless, bitter and continual. Hidden in a nook at the north end of the Haarlemer Meer and almost buried beneath bundles of reeds, partly as a protection from the weather and partly to escape the eyes of Spaniards, of whom companies were gathering from every direction to besiege Haarlem, lay the big boat. In it were Red Martin and Foy van Goorl. Mother Martha was not there for she had gone alone to an inn at a distance, to gather information if she could. To hundreds of the boers in these parts she was a known and trusted friend, although many of them might not choose to recognise her openly, and from among them, unless, indeed, she had been taken right away to Flanders, or even to Spain, she hoped to gather tidings of Elsa's whereabouts.

For two weary nights and days the Mare had been employed thus, but as yet without a shadow of success. Foy and Martin sat in the boat staring at each other gloomily; indeed Foy's face was piteous to see.

"What are you thinking of, master?" asked Martin presently.

"I am thinking," he answered, "that even if we find her now it will be too late; whatever was to be done, murder or marriage, will be done."

"Time to trouble about that when we have found her," said Martin, for he knew not what else to say, and added, "listen, I hear footsteps."

Foy drew apart two of the bundles of reeds and looked out into the driving rain.

"All right," he said, "it is Martha and a man."

Martin let his hand fall from the hilt of the sword Silence, for in those days hand and sword must be near together. Another minute and Martha and her companion were in the boat.

"Who is this man?" asked Foy.

"He is a friend of mine named Marsh Jan."

"Have you news?"

"Yes, at least Marsh Jan has."

"Speak, and be swift," said Foy, turning on the man fiercely.

"Am I safe from vengeance?" asked Marsh Jan, who was a good fellow enough although he had drifted into evil company, looking doubtfully at Foy and Martin.

"Have I not said so," answered Martha, "and does the Mare break her word?"

Then Marsh Jan told his tale: How he was one of the party that two nights before had rowed Elsa, or at least a young woman who answered to her description, to the Red Mill, not far from Velzen, and how she was in the immediate charge of a man and a woman who could be no other than Hague Simon and Black Meg. Also he told of her piteous appeal to the boatmen in the names of their wives and daughters, and at the telling of it Foy wept with fear and rage, and even Martha gnashed her teeth. Only Martin cast off the boat and began to punt her out into deep water.

"Is that all?" asked Foy.

"That is all, Mynheer, I know nothing more, but I can explain to you where the place is."

"You can show us, you mean," said Foy.

The man expostulated. The weather was bad, there would be a flood, his wife was ill and expected him, and so forth. Then he tried to get out of the boat, whereon, catching hold of him suddenly, Martin threw him into the stern-sheets, saying:

"You could travel to this mill once taking with you a girl whom you knew to be kidnapped, now you can travel there again to get her out. Sit still and steer straight, or I will make you food for fishes."

Then Marsh Jan professed himself quite willing to sail

to the Red Mill, which he said they ought to reach by nightfall.

All that afternoon they sailed and rowed, till, with the darkness, before ever the mill was in sight, the great flood came down upon them and drove them hither and thither, such a flood as had not been seen in those districts for a dozen years. But Marsh Jan knew his bearings well; he had the instinct of locality that is bred in those whose forefathers for generations have won a living from the fens, and through it all he held upon a straight course.

Once Foy thought that he heard a voice calling for help in the darkness, but it was not repeated and they went forward. At last the sky cleared and the moon shone out upon such a waste of waters as Noah might have beheld from the ark. Only there were things floating in them that Noah would scarcely have seen; hayricks, dead and drowning cattle, household furniture, and once even a coffin washed from some graveyard, while beyond stretched the dreary outline of the sand dunes.

"The mill should be near," said Marsh Jan, "let us put about." So they turned, rowing with weary arms, for the wind had fallen.

Let us go back a little. Elsa, on escaping from the scene of her mock marriage, fled to her room and bolted its door. A few seconds later she heard hands hammering at it, and the voices of Hague Simon and Black Meg calling to her to open. She took no note, the hammering ceased, and then it was that for the first time she became aware of a dreadful, roaring noise, a noise of many waters. Time passed as it passes in a nightmare, till suddenly, above the dull roar, came sharp sounds as of wood cracking and splitting, and Elsa felt that the whole fabric of the mill had tilted. Beneath the pressure of the flood it

had given where it was weakest, at its narrow waist, and now its red cap hung over like a wind-laid tree.

Terror took hold of Elsa, and running to the door she opened it hoping to escape down the stairs. Behold! water was creeping up them, she could see it by the lantern in her hand—her retreat was cut off. But there were other stairs leading to the top storey of the mill that now lay at a steep angle, and along these she climbed, since the water was pouring through her doorway and there was nowhere else to go. In the very roof of the place was a manhole with a rotten hatch. She passed through this, to find herself upon the top of the mill just where one of the great naked arms of the sails projected from it. Her lantern was blown out by now, but she clung to the arm, and became aware that the wooden cap of the structure, still anchored to its brick foundation, lay upon its side rocking to and fro like a boat upon an angry sea. The water was near her; that she knew by its seethe and rush, although she could not see it, but as yet it did not even wet her feet.

The hours went by, how many, she never learned, till at length the clouds cleared; the moon became visible, and by its light she saw an awful scene. Everywhere around was water; it lapped within a yard, and it was rising still. Now Elsa saw that in the great beam she clasped were placed short spokes for the use of those who set the sails above. Up these she climbed as best she might, till she was able to pass her body between two of the vanes and support her breast upon the flat surface of one of them, as a person does who leans out of a window. From her window there was something to see. Quite near to her, but separated by fifteen or twenty feet of yellow frothing water, a little portion of the swelling shape of the mill stood clear of the flood. To this foam-lapped island clung two human beings—Hague Simon and Black Meg. They saw her also and screamed for help, but she had none to give.

Surely it was a dream—nothing so awful could happen outside a dream.

The fabric of the mill tilted more and more; the space to which the two vile creatures hung grew less and less. There was no longer room for both of them. They began to quarrel, to curse and jibber at each other, their fierce, bestial faces not an inch apart as they crouched there on hands and knees. The water rose a little, they were kneeling in it now, and the man, putting down his bald head, butted at the woman, almost thrusting her from her perch. But she was strong and active, she struggled back again; she did more, with an eel-like wriggle she climbed upon his back, weighing him down. He strove to shake her off but could not, for on that heaving, rolling surface he dared not loose his hand-grip, so he turned his flat and horrid face, and, seizing her leg between his teeth, bit and worried at it. In her pain and rage Meg screeched aloud—that was the cry which Foy had heard. Then suddenly she drew a knife from her bosom—Elsa saw it flash in the moonlight—and stabbed downwards once, twice, thrice.

Elsa shut her eyes. When she opened them again the woman was alone upon the little patch of red boarding, her body splayed out over it like that of a dead frog. So she lay a while till suddenly the cap of the Red Mill dipped slowly like a lady who makes a Court curtsey, and she vanished. It rose again and Meg was still there, moaning in her terror and water running from her dress. Then again it dipped, this time more deeply, and when the patch of rusty boarding slowly reappeared, it was empty. No, not quite, for clinging to it, yowling and spitting, was the half-wild black cat which Elsa had seen wandering about the mill. But of Black Meg there was no trace.

It was dreadfully cold up there hanging to the sail-bar, for now that the rain had finished, it began to freeze. Indeed, had it not chanced that Elsa was dressed in her warm

winter gown with fur upon it, and dry from her head to her feet, it is probable that she would have fallen off and perished in the water. As it was gradually her body became numb and her senses faded. She seemed to know that all this matter of her forced marriage, of the flood, and of the end of Simon and Meg, was nothing but a dream, a very evil nightmare from which she would awake presently to find herself snug and warm in her own bed in the Bree Straat. Of course it must be a nightmare, for look, there, on the bare patch of boarding beneath, the hideous struggle repeated itself. There lay Hague Simon gnawing at his wife's foot, only his fat, white face was gone, and in place of it he wore the head of a cat, for she, the watcher, could see its glowing eyes fixed upon her. And Meg—look how her lean limbs gripped him round the body. Listen to the thudding noise as the great knife fell between his shoulders. And now, see—she was growing tall, she had become a giantess, her face shot across the gulf of water and swam upwards through the shadows till it was within a foot of her. Oh! she must fall, but first she would scream for help —surely the dead themselves could hear that cry. Better not have uttered it, it might bring Ramiro back; better go to join the dead. What did the voice say, Meg's voice, but how changed? That she was not to be afraid? That the thudding was the sound of oars not of knife thrusts? This would be Ramiro's boat coming to seize her. Of him and Adrian she could bear no more; she would throw herself into the water and trust to God. One, two, three—then utter darkness.

Elsa became aware that light was shining about her, also that somebody was kissing her upon the face and lips. A horrible doubt struck her that it might be Adrian, and she opened her eyes ever so little to look. No, no, how very strange, it was not Adrian, it was Foy! Well, doubtless this must be all part of her vision, and as in dream or out



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of it Foy had a perfect right to kiss her if he chose, she saw no reason to interfere. Now she seemed to hear a familiar voice, that of Red Martin, asking someone how long it would take them to make Haarlem with this wind, to which another voice answered, "About three-quarters of an hour."

It was very odd, and why did he say Haarlem and not Leyden? Next the second voice, which also seemed familiar, said:

"Look out, Foy, she's coming to herself." Then someone poured wine down her throat, whereupon, unable to bear this bewilderment any longer, Elsa sat up and opened her eyes wide, to see before her Foy, and none other than Foy in the flesh.

She gasped, and began to sink back again with joy and weakness, whereon he cast his arms about her and drew her to his breast. Then she remembered everything.

"Oh! Foy, Foy," she cried, "you must not kiss me."

"Why not?" he asked.

"Because—because I am married."

Of a sudden his happy face became ghastly. "Married!" he stammered. "Who to?"

"To—your brother, Adrian."

He stared at her in amazement, then asked slowly:

"Did you run away from Leyden to marry him?"

"How dare you ask such a question?" replied Elsa with a flash of spirit.

"Perhaps, then, you would explain?"

"What is there to explain? I thought that you knew. They dragged me away, and last night, just before the flood burst, I was gagged and married by force."

"Oh! Adrian, my friend," groaned Foy, "wait till I catch you, my friend Adrian."

"To be just," explained Elsa, "I don't think Adrian wanted to marry me much, but he had to choose between

word."

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in the boat, or perhaps he w

"In which case you are
have expected," said Foy m
towards her.

But Elsa moved a little aw
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"I do not know," she answ
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Foy," she added, warningly, "
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little, Elsa, then tell us your s

"One question first, Foy.

"We heard a woman screa
once near at hand, and ...

of the sail, and Marsh Jan managed the helm. When she had finished it, Martin whispered to Foy, and as though by a common impulse all four of them kneeled down upon the boards in the bottom of the boat, and returned thanks to the Almighty that this maiden, quite unharmed, had been delivered out of such manifold and terrible dangers, and this by the hands of her own friends and of the man to whom she was affianced. When they had finished their service of thanksgiving, which was as simple as it was solemn and heartfelt, they rose, and now Elsa did not forbid that Foy should hold her hand.

"Say, sweetheart," he asked, "is it true that you think anything of this forced marriage?"

"Hear me before you answer," broke in Martha. "It is no marriage at all, for none can be wed without the consent of their own will, and you gave no such consent."

"It is no marriage," echoed Martin, "and if it be, and I live, then the sword shall cut its knot."

"It is no marriage," said Foy, "for although we have not stood together before the altar, yet our hearts are wed, so how can you be made the wife of another man?"

"Dearest," replied Elsa, when they had all spoken, "I too am sure that it is no marriage, yet a priest spoke the marriage words over me, and a ring was thrust upon my hand, so, to the law, if there be any law left in the Netherlands, I am perhaps in some sort a wife. Therefore, before I can become wife to you these facts must be made public, and I must appeal to the law to free me, lest in days to come others should be troubled."

"And if the law cannot, or will not, Elsa, what then?"

"Then, dear, our consciences being clean, we will be a law to ourselves. But first we must wait a while. Are you satisfied now, Foy?"

"No," answered Foy sulkily, "for it is monstrous that

such devil's work should keep us apart even for an hour. Yet in this, as in all, I will obey you, dear."

"Marrying and giving in marriage!" broke in Martha in a shrill voice. "Talk no more of such things, for there is other work before us. Look yonder, girl, what do you see?" and she pointed to the dry land. "The hosts of the Amalekites marching in their thousands to slaughter us and our brethren, the children of the Lord. Look behind you, what do you see? The ships of the tyrant sailing up to encompass the city of the children of the Lord. It is the day of death and desolation, the day of Armageddon, and ere the sun sets red upon it many a thousand must pass through the gates of doom, we, mayhap, among them. Then up with the flag of freedom; out with the steel of truth, gird on the buckler of righteousness, and snatch the shield of hope. Fight, fight for the liberty of the land that bore you, for the memory of Christ, the King who died for you, for the faith to which you are born; fight, fight, and when the fray is done, then, and not before, think of peace and love.

"Nay, children, look not so fearful, for I, the mad mere-wife, tell you, by the Grace of God, that you have nought to fear. Who preserved you in the torture den, Foy van Goorl? What hand was it that held your life and honour safe when you sojourned among devils in the Red Mill yonder and kept your head above the waters of the flood, Elsa Brant? You know well, and I, Martha, tell you that this same hand shall hold you safe until the end. Yes, I know it, I know it; thousands shall fall upon your right hand and tens of thousands upon your left, but you shall live through the hunger; the arrows of the pestilence shall pass you by, the sword of the wicked shall not harm you. For me it is otherwise, at length my doom draws near and I am well content; but for you twain, Foy and Elsa, I foretell many years of earthly joy."

Thus spoke Martha, and it seemed to those who watched her that her wild, disfigured face shone with a light of inspiration, nor did they who knew her story, and still believed that the spirit of prophecy could open the eyes of chosen seers, deem it strange that vision of the things to be should visit her. At the least they took comfort from her words, and for a while were no more afraid.

Yet they had much to fear. By a fateful accident they had been delivered from great dangers only to fall into dangers greater still, for as it chanced, on this tenth of December, 1572, they sailed straight into the grasp of the thousands of the Spanish armies which had been drawn like a net round the doomed city of Haarlem. There was no escape for them; nothing that had not wings could pass those lines of ships and soldiers. Their only refuge was the city, and in that city they must bide till the struggle, one of the most fearful of all that hideous war, was ended. But at least they had this comfort, they would face the woe together, and with them were two who loved them, Martha, the "Spanish Scourge," and Red Martin, the free Frisian, the mighty man of war whom God had appointed to them as a shield of defence.

So they smiled on each other, these two lovers of long ago, and sailed bravely on to the closing gates of Haarlem.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ATONEMENT

SEVEN months had gone by, seven of the most dreadful months ever lived through by human beings. For all this space of time, through the frosts and snows and fogs of winter, through the icy winds of spring, and now deep into the heart of summer, the city of Haarlem had been closely beleaguered by an army of thirty thousand Spaniards, most of them veteran troops under the command of Don Frederic, the son of Alva, and other generals. Against this disciplined host were opposed the little garrison of four thousand Hollanders and Germans aided by a few Scotch and English soldiers, together with a population of about twenty thousand old men, women and children. From day to day, from week to week, from month to month, the struggle was waged between these unequal forces, marked on either side by the most heroic efforts and by cruelties that would strike our age as monstrous. For in those times the captive prisoner of war could expect no mercy; indeed, he was fortunate if he were not hung from a gibbet by the leg to die slowly within eyeshot of his friends.

There were battles without number, men perished in hecatombs; among the besieging armies alone over twelve thousand lost their lives, so that the neighbourhood of Haarlem became one vast graveyard, and the fish in the lake were poisoned by the dead. Assault, sortie, ambuscade, artifice of war; combats to the death upon the ice between skate-shod soldiers; desperate sea fights, attempts to storm; the explosion of mines and counter-mines that

brought death to hundreds—all these became the familiar incidents of daily life.

Then there were other horrors; cold from insufficient fuel, pestilences of various sorts such as always attend a siege, and, worst of all for the beleaguered, hunger. Week by week as the summer aged, the food grew less and less, till at length there was nothing. The weeds that grew in the street, the refuse of tanneries, the last ounce of offal, the mice and the cats, all had been devoured. On the lofty steeple of St. Bavon for days and days had floated a black flag to tell the Prince of Orange in Leyden that below it was despair as black. The last attempt at succour had been made. Batenburg had been defeated and slain, together with the Seigneurs of Clotingen and Carloo, and five or six hundred men. Now there was no more hope.

Desperate expedients were suggested: That the women, children, aged and sick should be left in the city, while the able-bodied men cut a way through the battalions of their besiegers. On these non-combatants it was hoped that the Spaniard would have mercy—as though the Spaniard could have mercy, he who afterwards dragged the wounded and the ailing to the door of the hospital and there slaughtered them in cold blood; aye, and here and elsewhere, did other things too dreadful to write down. Says the old chronicler, "But this being understood by the women, they assembled all together, making the most pitiful cries and lamentations that could be heard, the which would have moved a heart of flint, so as it was not possible to abandon them."

Next another plan was formed: that all the females and helpless should be set in the centre of a square of the fighting men, to march out and give battle to the foe till everyone was slain. Then the Spaniards hearing this and growing afraid of what these desperate men might do, fell back on guile. If they would surrender, the citizens of Haarlem

were told, and pay two hundred and forty thousand florins, no punishment should be inflicted. So, having neither food nor hope, they listened to the voice of the tempter and surrendered, they who had fought until their garrison of four thousand was reduced to eighteen hundred men.

It was noon and past on the fatal twelfth of July. The gates were open, the Spaniards, those who were left alive of them, Don Frederic at their head, with drums beating, banners flying, and swords sharpened for murder, were marching into the city of Haarlem. In a deep niche between two great brick piers of the cathedral were gathered four people whom we know. War and famine had left them all alive, yet they had borne their share of both. In every enterprise, however desperate, Foy and Martin had marched, or stood, or watched side by side, and well did the Spaniards know the weight of the great sword Silence and the red-headed giant who wielded it. Mother Martha, too, had not been idle. Throughout the siege she had served as the lieutenant of the widow Hasselaer, who with a band of three hundred women fought day and night alongside of their husbands and brothers. Even Elsa, who although she was too delicate and by nature timid and unfitted to go out to battle, had done her part, for she laboured at the digging of mines and the building of walls till her soft hands were rough and scarred.

How changed they were. Foy, whose face had been so youthful, looked now like a man on the wrong side of middle age. The huge Martin might have been a great skeleton on which hung clothes, or rather rags and a rent bull's hide, with his blue eyes shining in deep pits beneath the massive, projecting skull. Elsa too had become quite small, like a child. Her sweet face was no longer pretty, only pitiful, and all the roundness of her figure had vanished—she might have been an emaciated boy. Of the

four of them Martha the Mare, who was dressed like a man, showed the least change. Indeed, except that now her hair was snowy, that her features were rather more horse-like, that the yellow, lipless teeth projected even further, and the thin nervous hands had become almost like those of an Egyptian mummy, she was much as she always had been.

Martin leaned upon the great sword and groaned. "Curses on them, the cowards," he muttered; "why did they not let us go out and die fighting? Fools, mad fools, who would trust to the mercy of the Spaniard."

"Oh! Foy," said Elsa, throwing her thin arms about his neck, "you will not let them take me, will you? If it comes to the worst, you will kill me, won't you? Otherwise I must kill myself, and Foy, I am a coward, I am afraid—to do that."

"I suppose so," he answered in a harsh, unnatural voice, "but oh! God, if Thou art, have pity upon her. Oh! God have pity."

"Blaspheme not, doubt not!" broke in the shrill voice of Martha. "Has it not been as I told you last winter in the boat? Have you not been protected, and shall you not be protected to the end? Only blaspheme not, doubt not!"

The niche in which they were standing was out of sight of the great square and those who thronged it, but as Martha spoke a band of the victorious Spaniards, seven or eight of them, came round the corner and caught sight of the party in the nook.

"There's a girl," said the sergeant in command of them, "who isn't bad looking. Pull her out, men."

Some fellows stepped forward to do his bidding. Now Foy went mad. He did not kill Elsa as she had prayed him, he flew straight at the throat of the brute who had spoken, and next instant his sword was standing out a foot

behind his neck. Then after him, with a kind of low cry, came Martin, plying the great blade Silence, and Martha after him with her long knife. It was all over in a minute, but before it was done there were five men down, three dead and two sore wounded.

"A tithe and an offering!" muttered Martha as, bounding forward, she bent over the wounded men, and their comrades fled round the corner of the cathedral.

There was a minute's pause. The bright summer sunlight shone upon the faces and armour of the dead Spaniards, upon the naked sword of Foy, who stood over Elsa crouched to the ground in a corner of the niche, her face hidden in her hands, upon the terrible blue eyes of Martin alight with a dreadful fire of rage. Then there came the sound of marching men, and a company of Spaniards appeared before them, and at their head—Ramiro and Adrian called van Goorl.

"There they are, captain," said a soldier, one of those who had fled; "shall we shoot them?"

Ramiro looked, carelessly enough at first, then again a long, scrutinising look. So he had caught them at last! Months ago he had learned that Elsa had been rescued from the Red Mill by Foy and Martin, and now, after much seeking, the birds were in his net.

"No," he said, "I think not. Such desperate characters must be reserved for separate trial."

"Where can they be kept, captain?" asked the sergeant sulkily.

"I observed, friend, that the house which my son and I have taken as our quarters has excellent cellars; they can be imprisoned there for the present—that is, except the young lady, whom the Señor Adrian will look after. As it chances, she is his wife."

At this the soldiers laughed openly.

"I repeat—his wife, for whom he has been searching



THEN THERE CAME THE SOUND OF MARCHING MEN



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these many months," said Ramiro, "and, therefore, to be respected. Do you understand, men?"

Apparently they did understand, at least no one made any answer. Their captain, as they had found, was not a man who loved argument.

"Now, then, you fellows," went on Ramiro, "give up your arms."

Martin thought a while. Evidently he was wondering whether it would not be best to rush at them and die fighting. At that moment, as he said afterwards indeed, the old saying came into his mind, "A game is not lost until it is won," and remembering that dead men can never have another chance of winning games, he gave up the sword.

"Hand that to me," said Ramiro. "It is a curious weapon to which I have taken a fancy."

So sword Silence was handed to him, and he slung it over his shoulder. Foy looked at the kneeling Elsa, and he looked at his sword. Then an idea struck him, and he looked at the face of Adrian, his brother, whom he had last seen when the said Adrian ran to warn him and Martin at the factory, for though he knew that he was fighting with his father among the Spaniards, during the siege they had never met. Even then, in that dire extremity, with a sudden flash of thought he wondered how it happened that Adrian, being the villain that he was, had taken the trouble to come and warn them yonder in Leyden, thereby giving them time to make a very good defence in the shot tower.

Foy looked up at his brother. Adrian was dressed in the uniform of a Spanish officer, with a breast-plate over his quilted doublet, and a steel cap, from the front of which rose a frayed and weather-worn plume of feathers. The face had changed; there was none of the old pomposity about those handsome features; it looked worn and cowed, like that of an animal which has been trained to do tricks by hunger and the use of the whip. Yet, through all

the shame and degradation, Foy seemed to catch the glint of some kind of light, a light of good desire shining behind that piteous mask, as the sun sometimes shines through a sullen cloud. Could it be that Adrian was not quite so bad after all? That he was, in fact, the Adrian that he, Foy, had always believed him to be, vain, silly, passionate, exaggerated, born to be a tool and think himself the master, but beneath everything, well-meaning? Who could say? At the worst, too, was it not better that Elsa should become the wife of Adrian than that her life should cease there and then, and by her lover's hand?

These things passed through his brain as the lightning passes through the sky. In an instant his mind was made up and Foy flung down his sword at the feet of a soldier. As he did so his eyes met the eyes of Adrian, and to his imagination they seemed to be full of thanks and promise.

They took them all; with gibes and blows the soldiers haled them away through the tumult and the agony of the fallen town and its doomed defenders. Out of the rich sunlight they led them into a house that still stood not greatly harmed by the cannon-shot, but a little way from the shattered Ravelin and the gate which had been the scene of such fearful conflict—a house that was the home of one of the wealthiest merchants in Haarlem. Here Foy and Elsa were parted. She struggled to his arms, whence they tore her and dragged her away up the stairs, but Martin, Martha and Foy were thrust into a dark cellar, locked in and left.

A while later the door of the cellar was unbarred and some hand, they could not see whose, passed through it water and food, good food such as they had not tasted for months; meat and bread and dried herrings, more than they could eat of them.

"Perhaps it is poisoned," said Foy, smelling at it hungrily.

"What need to take the trouble to poison us?" answered Martin. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

So like starving animals they devoured the food with thankfulness and then they slept, yes, in the midst of all their misery and doubts they slept.

It seemed but a few minutes later—in fact it was eight hours—when the door opened again and there entered Adrian carrying a lantern in his hand.

"Foy, Martin," he said, "get up and follow me if you would save your lives."

Instantly they were wide awake.

"Follow you—*you?*" stammered Foy in a choked voice.

"Yes," Adrian answered quietly. "Of course you may not escape, but if you stop here what chance have you? Ramiro, my father, will be back presently and then——"

"It is madness to trust ourselves to you," interrupted Martin, and Adrian seemed to wince at the contempt in his voice.

"I knew that you would think that," he answered humbly, "but what else is to be done? I can pass you out of the city, I have made a boat ready for you to escape in, all at the risk of my own life; what more can I do? Why do you hesitate?"

"Because we do not believe you," said Foy; "besides, there is Elsa. I will not go without Elsa."

"I have thought of that," answered Adrian. "Elsa is here. Come, Elsa, show yourself."

Then from the stairs Elsa crept into the cellar, a new Elsa, for she, too, had been fed, and in her eyes there shone a light of hope. A wild jealousy filled Foy's heart. Why did she look thus? But she, she ran to him, she flung her arms about his neck and kissed him, and Adrian did nothing, he only turned his head aside.

"Foy," she gasped, "he is honest after all; he has only been unfortunate. Come quickly, there is a chance for us;

come before that devil returns. Now he is at a council of the officers settling with Don Frederic who are to be killed, but soon he will be back, and then——"

So they hesitated no more, but went.

They passed out of the house, none stopping them—the guard had gone to the sack. At the gate by the ruined Ravelin there stood a sentry, but the man was careless, or drunken, or bribed, who knows? At least, Adrian gave him a pass-word, and, nodding his head, he let them by. A few minutes later they were at the Mere side, and there among some reeds lay the boat.

"Enter and be gone," said Adrian.

They scrambled into the boat and took the oars, while Martha began to push off.

"Adrian," said Elsa, "what is to become of you?"

"Why do you trouble about that?" he asked with a bitter laugh. "I go back to my death, my blood is the price of your freedom. Well, I owe it you."

"Oh! no," she cried, "come with us."

"Yes," echoed Foy, although again that bitter pang of jealousy gripped his heart, "come with us—brother."

"Do you really mean it?" Adrian asked, hesitating. "Think, I might betray you."

"If so, young man, why did you not do it before?" growled Martin, and stretching out his great, bony arm he gripped him by the collar and dragged him into the boat.

Then they rowed away.

"Where are we going?" asked Martin.

"To Leyden, I suppose," said Foy, "if we can get there, which, without a sail or weapons, seems unlikely."

"I have put some arms in the boat," interrupted Adrian, "the best I could get," and from a locker he drew out a common heavy axe, a couple of Spanish swords, a knife, a smaller axe, a cross-bow and some bolts.

"Not so bad," said Martin, rowing with his left hand

as he handled the big axe with his right, "but I wish that I had my sword Silence, which that accursed Ramiro took from me and hung about his neck. I wonder why he troubled himself with the thing? It is too long for a man of his inches."

"I don't know," said Adrian, "but when last I saw him he was working at its hilt with a chisel, which seemed strange. He always wanted that sword. During the siege he offered a large reward to any soldier who could kill you and bring it to him."

"Working at the hilt with a chisel?" gasped Martin. "By Heaven, I had forgotten! The map, the map! Some wicked villain must have told him that the map of the treasure was there—that is why he wanted the sword."

"Who could have told him?" asked Foy. "It was only known to you and me and Martha, and we are not of the sort to tell. What? Give away the secret of Hendrik Brant's treasure which he could die for and we were sworn to keep, to save our miserable lives? Shame upon the thought!"

Martha heard, and looked at Elsa, a questioning look beneath which the poor girl turned a fiery red, though by good fortune in that light none could see her blushes. Still, she must speak lest the suspicion should lie on others.

"I ought to have told you before," she said in a low voice, "but I forgot—I mean that I have always been so dreadfully ashamed. It was I who betrayed the secret of the sword Silence."

"You? How did you know it?" asked Foy.

"Mother Martha told me on the night of the church burning after you escaped from Leyden."

Martin grunted. "One woman to trust another, and at her age too; what a fool!"

"Fool yourself, you thick-headed Frisian," broke in

Martha angrily, "where did you learn to teach your betters wisdom? I told the Jufvrouw because I knew that we might all of us be swept away, and I thought it well that then she should know where to look for a key to the treasure."

"A woman's kind of reason," answered Martin imperturbably, "and a bad one at that, for if we had been finished off she must have found it difficult to get hold of the sword. But all this is done with. The point is, why did the Jufvrouw tell Ramiro?"

"Because I am a coward," answered Elsa with a sob. "You know, Foy, I always was a coward, and I never shall be anything else. I told him to save myself."

"From what?" hesitated Foy.

"From being married."

Adrian winced palpably, and Foy, noting it, could not resist pushing the point.

"From being married? But I understood—doubtless Adrian will explain the thing," he added grimly—"that you were forced through some ceremony."

"Yes," answered Elsa feebly, "I—I—was. I tried to buy myself off by telling Ramiro the secret, which will show you all how mad I was with terror at the thought of this hateful marriage"—here a groan burst from the lips of Adrian, and something like a chuckle from those of Red Martin. "Oh! I am so sorry," went on Elsa in confusion; "I am sure that I did not wish to hurt Adrian's feelings, especially after he has been so good to us."

"Never mind Adrian's feelings and his goodness, but go on with the story," interrupted Foy.

"There isn't much more to tell. Ramiro swore before God that if I gave him the clue he would let me go, and then—then, well, then, after I had fallen into the pit and disgraced myself, he said that it was not sufficient, and that the marriage must take place."

At this both Foy and Martin laughed outright. Yes, even there they laughed.

"Why, you silly child," said Foy, "what else did you expect him to say?"

"Oh! Martin, do you forgive me?" said Elsa. "Immediately after I had done it I knew how shameful it was, and that he would try to hunt you down, and that is why I have been afraid to tell you ever since. But I pray you believe me; I only spoke because, between shame and fear, I did not know right from wrong. Do you forgive me?"

"Lady," answered the Frisian, smiling in his slow fashion, "if I had been there unknown to Ramiro, and you had offered him this head of mine on a dish as a bribe, not only would I have forgiven you but I would have said that you did right. You are a maid, and you had to protect yourself from a very dreadful thing; therefore who can blame you?"

"I can," said Martha. "Ramiro might have torn me to pieces with red-hot pincers before I told him."

"Yes," said Martin, who felt that he had a debt to pay, "Ramiro might, but I doubt whether he would have gone to that trouble to persuade you to take a husband. No, don't be angry. 'Frisian thick of head, Frisian free of speech,' goes the saying."

Not being able to think of any appropriate rejoinder, Martha turned again upon Elsa.

"Your father died for that treasure," she said, "and Dirk van Goorl died for it, and your lover and his serving-man there went to the torture-den for it, and I—well, I have done a thing or two. But you, girl, why, at the first pinch, you betray the secret. But, as Martin says, I was fool enough to tell you."

"Oh! you are hard," said Elsa, beginning to weep under Martha's bitter reproaches; "but you forget that at least none of you were asked to marry—oh! I mustn't say that.

I mean to become the wife of one man;" then her eyes fell upon Foy and an inspiration seized her; here, at least, was one of whom she could make a friend—"when you happen to be very much in love with another."

"Of course not," said Foy, "there is no need for you to explain."

"I think there is a great deal to explain," went on Martha, "for you cannot fool me with pretty words. But now, hark you, Foy van Goorl, what is to be done? We have striven hard to save that treasure, all of us; is it to be lost at the last?"

"Aye," echoed Martin, growing very serious, "is it to be lost at the last? Remember what the worshipful Hendrik Brant said to us yonder on that night at The Hague—that he believed that in a day to come thousands and tens of thousands of our people would bless the gold he entrusted to us."

"I remember it all," answered Foy, "and other things too; his will, for instance," and he thought of his father and of those hours which Martin and he had spent in the Gevangenhuis. Then he looked up at Martha and said briefly: "Mother, though they call you mad, you are the wisest among us; what is your counsel?"

She pondered awhile and answered: "This is certain, that so soon as Ramiro finds that we have escaped, having the key to it, he will take boat and sail to the place where the barrels are buried, knowing well that otherwise we shall be off with them. Yes, I tell you that by dawn, or within an hour of it, he will be there," and she stopped.

"You mean," said Foy, "that we ought to be there before him."

Martha nodded and answered, "If we can, but I think that at best there must be a fight for it."

"Yes," said Martin, "a fight. Well, I should like

another fight with Ramiro. That fork-tongued adder has got my sword, and I want to get it back again."

"Oh," broke in Elsa, "is there to be more fighting? I hoped that at last we were safe, and going straight to Leyden, where the Prince is. I hate this bloodshed; I tell you, Foy, it frightens me to death; I believe that I shall die of it."

"You hear what she says?" asked Foy.

"We hear," answered Martha. "Take no heed of her, the child has suffered much, she is weak and squeamish. Now I, although I believe that my death lies before me, I say, go on and fear not."

"But I do take heed," said Foy. "Not for all the treasures in the world shall Elsa be put in danger again if she does not wish it; she shall decide, and she alone."

"How good you are to me," she murmured, then she mused a moment. "Foy," she said, "will you promise something to me?"

"After your experience of Ramiro's oaths I wonder that you ask," he answered, trying to be cheerful.

"Will you promise," she went on, taking no note, "that if I say yes and we go, not to Leyden, but to seek the treasure, and live through it, that you will take me away from this land of bloodshed and murder and torments, to some country where folk may live at peace, and see no one killed, except it be now and again an evil-doer? It is much to ask, but oh! Foy, will you promise?"

"Yes, I promise," said Foy, for he, too, was weary of this daily terror. Who would not have been that had passed through the siege of Haarlem?

Foy was steering, but now Martha slipped aft and took the tiller from his hand. For a moment she studied the stars that grew clearer in the light of the sinking moon, then shifted the helm a point or two to port and sat still.

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When at length they had

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"Speak on," said Foy.

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ing her, meaning her no harm, to save her from the grip of Ramiro, and knowing at heart that it was no marriage; of how, when the flood burst upon them, he had been hustled from the mill where, since she could no longer be of service to him and might work him injury, as he discovered afterwards, Ramiro had left Elsa to her fate. Lastly, in a broken voice, he told them of his life during the long siege which, so he said, was as the life of a damned spirit, and of how, when death thinned the ranks of the Spaniards, he had been made an officer among them, and by the special malice of Ramiro forced to conduct the executions and murders of such Hollanders as they took.

Then at last his chance had come. Ramiro, thinking that now he could never turn against him, had given him Elsa, and left him with her while he went about his duties and to secure a share of the plunder, meaning to deal with his prisoners on the morrow. So he, Adrian, a man in authority, had provided the boat and freed them. That was all he had to say, except to renounce any claim upon her who was called his wife, and to beg their forgiveness.

Foy listened to the end. Then, dropping his oar for a moment, he put his arm about Adrian's waist and hugged him, saying in his old cheery voice:

"I was right after all. You know, Adrian, I always stood up for you, notwithstanding your temper and queer ways. No, I never would believe that you were a villain, but neither could I ever have believed that you were quite such an ass."

To this outspoken estimate of his character, so fallen and crushed was he, his brother had not the spirit to reply. He could merely tug at his oar and groan, while the tears of shame and repentance ran down his pale and handsome face.

"Never mind, old fellow," said Foy consolingly. "It all went wrong, thanks to you, and thanks to you I believe

that it will all come right again. So we will cry quits and forget the rest."

Poor Adrian glanced up at Foy and at Elsa sitting on the thwart of the boat by his side.

"Yes, brother," he answered, "for you and Elsa it may come right, but not for me in this world, for I—I have sold myself to the devil and—got no pay."

After that for a while no one spoke; all felt that the situation was too tragic for speech; even the follies, and indeed the wickedness, of Adrian were covered up, were blotted out in the tragedy of his utter failure, yes, and redeemed by the depth of his atonement.

The grey light of the summer morning began to grow on the surface of the great inland sea. Far behind them they beheld the sun's rays breaking upon the gilt crown that is set above the tower of St. Bavon's Church, soaring over the lost city of Haarlem and the doomed patriots who lay there presently to meet their death at the murderer's sword. They looked and shuddered. Had it not been for Adrian they would be prisoners now, and what that meant they knew. If they had been in any doubt, what they saw around must have enlightened them, for here and there upon the misty surface of the lake, or stranded in its shallows, were the half-burnt out hulls of ships, the remains of the conquered fleet of William the Silent; a poor record of the last desperate effort to relieve the starving city. Now and again, too, something limp and soft would cumber their oars, the corpse of a drowned or slaughtered man still clad perchance in its armour.

At length they passed out of these dismal remains of lost men, and Elsa could look about her without shuddering. Now they were in fleet water, and in among the islands whereon the lush summer growth of weeds and the beautiful marsh flowers grew as greenly and bloomed as bright as

though no Spaniard had trampled their roots under foot during all those winter months of siege and death. These islets, scores and hundreds of them, appeared on every side, but between them all Martha steered an unerring path. As the sun rose she stood up in the boat, and shading her eyes with her hand to shut out its level rays, looked before her.

"There is the place," she said, pointing to a little bulrush-clad isle, from which a kind of natural causeway, not more than six feet wide, projected like a tongue among muddy shallows peopled by coots and water-hens with their red-beaked young.

Martin rose too. Then he looked back behind him and said:

"I see the cap of a sail upon the skyline. It is Ramiro."

"Without doubt," answered Martha calmly. "Well, we have the half of an hour to work in. Pull, bow oar, pull, we will go round the island and beach her in the mud on the further side. They will be less likely to see us there, and I know a place whence we can push off in a hurry."

CHAPTER XXIX

ADRIAN COMES HOME AGAIN

THEY landed on the island, wading to it through the mud, which at this spot had a gravelly bottom; all of them except Elsa, who remained in the boat to keep watch. Following otter-paths through the thick rushes they came to the centre of the islet, some thirty yards away. Here, at a spot which Martha ascertained by a few hurried pacings, grew a dense tuft of reeds. In the midst of these reeds was a duck's nest with the young just hatching out, off which the old bird flew with terrified quackings.

Beneath this nest lay the treasure, if it were still there.

"At any rate the place has not been disturbed lately," said Foy. Then, even in his frantic haste, lifting the little fledglings—for he loved all things that had life, and did not wish to see them hurt—he deposited them where they might be found again by the mother.

"Nothing to dig with," muttered Martin, "not even a stone." Thereon Martha pushed her way to a willow bush that grew near, and with the smaller of the two axes, which she held in her hand, cut down the thickest of its stems and ran back with them. By the help of these sharpened stakes, and with their axes, they began to dig furiously, till at length the point of Foy's implement struck upon the head of a barrel.

"The stuff is still here, keep to it, friends," he said, and they worked on with a will till three of the five barrels were almost free from the mud.



"Best make sure of these," said Martin. "Help me, master," and between them one by one they rolled them to the water's edge, and with great efforts, Elsa aiding them, lifted them into the boat. As they approached with the third cask they found her staring white-faced over the tops of the feathery reeds.

"What is it, sweet?" asked Foy.

"The sail, the following sail," she answered.

They rested the barrel of gold upon the gunwale and looked back across the little island. Yes, there it came, sure enough, a tall, white sail not eight hundred yards away and bearing down straight upon the place. Martin rolled the barrel into position.

"I hoped that they would not find it," he said, "but Martha draws maps well, too well. Once, before she married, she painted pictures, and that is why."

"What is to be done?" asked Elsa.

"I don't know," he answered, and as he spoke Martha ran up, for she also had seen the boat. "You see," he went on, "if we try to escape they will catch us, for oars can't race a sail."

"Oh!" said Elsa, "must we be taken after all?"

"I hope not, girl," said Martha, "but it is as God wills. Listen, Martin," and she whispered in his ear.

"Good," he said, "if it can be done, but you must watch your chance. Come, now, there is no time to lose. And you, lady, come also, for you can help to roll the last two barrels."

Then they ran back to the hole, whence Foy and Adrian, with great toil, had just dragged the last of the tubs. For they, too, had seen the sail, and knew that time was short.

"Heer Adrian," said Martin, "you have the cross-bow and the bolts, and you used to be the best shot of all three of us; will you help me to hold the causeway?"

Now Adrian knew that Martin said this, not because he

was a good shot with the cross-bow, but because he did not trust him, and wished to have him close to his hand, but he answered:

"With all my heart, as well as I am able."

"Very good," said Martin. "Now let the rest of you get those two casks into the boat, leaving the Jufvrouw hidden in the reeds to watch by it, while you, Foy and Martha, come back to help us. Lady, if they sail round the island, call and let us know."

So Martin and Adrian went down to the end of the little gravelly tongue and crouched among the tall meadow-sweet and grasses, while the others, working furiously, rolled the two barrels to the water-edge and shipped them, throwing rushes over them that they might not catch the eye of the Spaniards.

The sailing-boat drew on. In the stern-sheets of it sat Ramiro, an open paper, which he was studying, upon his knee, and still slung about his body the great sword Silence.

"Before I am half an hour older," reflected Martin, for even now he did not like to trust his thoughts to Adrian, "either I will have that sword back again, or I shall be a dead man. But the odds are great, eleven of them, all tough fellows, and we but three and two women."

Just then Ramiro's voice reached them across the stillness of the water.

"Down with the sail," he cried cheerily, "for without a doubt that is the place—there are the six islets in a line, there in front the other island shaped like a herring, and there the little promontory marked 'landing place.' How well this artist draws to be sure!"

The rest of his remarks were lost in the creaking of the blocks as the sail came down.

"Shallow water ahead, Señor," said a man in the bows sounding with a boat-hook.

"Good," answered Ramiro, throwing out the little anchor, "we will wade ashore."

As he spoke the Spanish soldier with the boat-hook suddenly pitched head first into the water, a quarrel from Adrian's crossbow through his heart.

"Ah!" said Ramiro, "so they are here before us. Well, there can't be many of them. Now then, prepare to land."

Another quarrel whistled through the air and stuck in the mast, doing no hurt. After this no more bolts came, for in his eagerness Adrian had broken the mechanism of the bow by over-winding it, so that it became useless. They leaped into the water, Ramiro with them, and charged for the land, when of a sudden, almost at the tip of the little promontory, from among the reeds rose the gigantic shape of Red Martin, clad in his tattered jerkin and bearing in his hand a heavy axe, while behind him appeared Foy and Adrian.

"Why, by the Saints!" cried Ramiro, "there's my weather-cock son again, fighting against us this time. Well, Weather-cock, this is your last veer," then he began to wade towards the promontory. "Charge," he cried, but not a man would advance within reach of that axe. They stood here and there in the water looking at it doubtfully, for although they were brave enough, there was none of them but knew of the strength and deeds of the red Frisian giant, and half-starved as he was, feared to meet him face to face. Moreover, he had a position of vantage, of that there could be no doubt.

"Can I help you to land, friends?" said Martin, mocking them. "No, it is no use looking right or left, the mud there is very deep."

"An arquebus, shoot him with an arquebus!" shouted the men in front; but there was no such weapon in the boat, for the Spaniards, who had left in a hurry, and without

expecting to meet Red Martin, had nothing but their swords and knives.

Ramiro considered a moment, for he saw that to attempt to storm this little landing-place would cost many lives, even if it were possible. Then he gave an order, "Back aboard." The men obeyed with alacrity. "Out oars and up anchor!" he cried.

"He is clever," said Foy; "he knows that our boat must be somewhere, and he is going to seek for it."

Martin nodded, and for the first time looked afraid. Then, as soon as Ramiro had begun to row round the islet, leaving Martha to watch that he did not return and rush the landing-stage, they crossed through the reeds to the other side and climbed into their boat. Scarcely were they there, when Ramiro and his men appeared, and a shout announced that they were discovered.

On crept the Spaniards as near as they dared, that is to within a dozen fathoms of them, and anchored, for they were afraid to run their own heavy sailing cutter upon the mud lest they might be unable to get her off again. Also, for evident reasons, being without firearms and knowing the character of the defenders, they feared to make a direct attack. The position was curious and threatened to be prolonged. At last Ramiro rose and addressed them across the water.

"Gentlemen and lady of the enemy," he said, "for I think that I see my little captive of the Red Mill among you, let us take counsel together. We have both of us made this expedition for a purpose, have we not—namely, to secure certain filthy lucre which, after all, would be of slight value to dead men? Now, as you, or some of you, know, I am a man opposed to violence; I wish to hurry the end of none, nor even to inflict suffering, if it can be avoided. But there is money in the question, to secure which I have already gone through a great deal of inconvenience and

anxiety, and, to be brief, that money I must have, while you, on the other hand are doubtless anxious to escape hence with your lives. So I make you an offer. Let one of our party come under safe conduct on board your boat and search it, just to see if anything lies beneath those rushes for instance. Then, if it is found empty, we will withdraw to a distance and let you go, or the same if full, that is, upon its contents being unladen into the mud."

"Are those all your terms?" asked Foy.

"Not quite all, worthy Heer van Goorl. Among you I observe a young gentleman whom doubtless you have managed to carry off against his will, to wit, my beloved son, Adrian. In his own interests, for he will scarcely be a welcome guest in Leyden, I ask that, before you depart, you should place this noble cavalier ashore in a position where we can see him. Now, what is your answer?"

"That you may go to hell to look for it," replied Martin rudely, while Foy added:

"What other answer do you expect from folk who have escaped out of your clutches in Haarlem?"

As he said the words, at a nod from Martin, Martha, who by now had crept up to them, under cover of his great form and of surrounding reeds, let go the stern of the boat and vanished.

"Plain words from plain, uncultivated people, not unnaturally irritated by the course of political events with which, although Fortune has mixed me up in them, I have nothing whatever to do," answered Ramiro. "But once more I beg you to consider. It is probable that you have no food upon your boat, whereas we have plenty. Also, in due course, darkness will fall, which must give us a certain advantage; moreover, I have reason to hope for assistance. Therefore, in a waiting game like this the cards are with me, and as I think your poor prisoner, Adrian, will tell you, I know how to play a hand at cards."

About eight yards from the cutter, in a thick patch of water-lilies, just at this moment an otter rose to take air—and old dog-otter, for it was grey-headed. One of the Spaniards in the boat caught sight of the ring it made, and picking up a stone from the ballast threw it at it idly. The otter vanished.

"We have been seeking each other a long while, but have never come to blows yet, although, being a brave man, I know you would wish it," said Red Martin modestly. "Señor Ramiro, will you do me the honour to overlook my humble birth and come ashore with me for a few minutes, man against man. The odds would be in your favour, for you have armour and I have nothing but a worn bull's hide, also you have my good sword Silence and I only a woodman's axe. Still I will risk it, and, what is more, trusting to your good faith, we are willing to wager the treasure of Hendrik Brant upon the issue."

So soon as they understood this challenge a roar of laughter went up from the Spaniards in the boat, in which Ramiro himself joined heartily. The idea of anyone voluntarily entering upon a single combat with the terrible Frisian giant, who for months had been a name of fear among the thousands that beleaguered Haarlem, struck them as really ludicrous.

But of a sudden they ceased laughing, and one and all stared with a strange anxiety at the bottom of their boat, much as terrier dogs stare at the earth beneath which they hear invisible vermin on the move. Then a great shouting arose among them, and they looked eagerly over the gunwales; yes, and began to stab at the water with their swords. But all the while through the tumult and voices came a steady, regular sound as of a person knocking heavily on the further side of a thick door.

"Mother of Heaven!" screamed someone in the cutter, "we are scuttled," and they began to tear at the false bot-



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"PAID BACK! PAID BACK, RAMIRO!"

tom of their boat, while others stabbed still more furiously at the surface of the Mere.

Now, rising one by one to the face of that quiet water, could be seen bubbles, and the line of them ran from the cutter towards the rowing boat. Presently, within six feet of it, axe in hand, rose the strange and dreadful figure of a naked, skeleton-like woman covered with mud and green weeds, and bleeding from great wounds in the back and sides.

There it stood, shaking an axe at the terror-stricken Spaniards, and screaming in short gasps,

"Paid back! paid back, Ramiro! Now sink and drown, you dog, or come, visit Red Martin on the shore."

"Well done, Martha," roared Martin, as he dragged her dying into the boat. While he spoke, lo! the cutter began to fill and sink.

"There is but one chance for it," cried Ramiro, "overboard and at them. It is not deep," and springing into the water, which reached to his neck, he began to wade towards the shore.

"Push off," cried Foy, and they thrust and pulled. But the gold was heavy, and their boat had settled far into the mud. Do what they might, she would not stir. Then uttering some strange Frisian oath, Martin sprang over her stern, and putting out all his mighty strength thrust at it to loose her. Still she would not move. The Spaniards came up, now the water reached only to their thighs, and their bright swords flashed in the sunlight.

"Cut them down!" yelled Ramiro. "At them for your lives' sake."

The boat trembled, but she would not stir.

"Too heavy in the bows," screamed Martha, and struggling to her feet, with one wild scream she launched herself straight at the throat of the nearest Spaniard. She gripped him with her long arms, and down they went together.

... a Spaniard.

"By heaven! no," roared
with the face of a devil.

For a second Martin stoo
sword-cut fell harmless upo
suddenly his great arms sl
by the thighs and lifted, an
man thrown into the air as t
a child at play, to fall headl
in the skiff prow where he la

Martin sprang forward a
outstretched hand as it glide

"Row, master, row," he cri
they were clear of the last
Even Elsa snatched a rolloc
on the hand who tried to st
his grip; a deed of valour she
life through. Then they dra

"Now, you Spanish dogs,"
them as he shook the wate
beard, "go dig for Brant's tr
here till Don Frederic sends t

The island had melted awa



the skyline rose the church towers of Leyden, for which they headed.

"Jufvrouw," said Martin presently, "there is another flagon of wine in that locker, and we should be glad of a pull at it."

Elsa, who was steering the boat, rose and found the wine and a horn mug, which she filled and handed first to Foy.

"Here's a health," said Foy as he drank, "to the memory of Mother Martha, who saved us all. Well, she died as she would have wished to die, taking a Spaniard for company, and her story will live on."

"Amen," said Martin. Then a thought struck him, and, leaving his oars for a minute, for he rowed two as against Foy's and Adrian's one, he went forward to where Ramiro lay stricken senseless on the kegs of specie and jewels in the bows, and took from him the great sword Silence. But he strapped the Spaniard's legs together with his belt.

"That crack on the head keeps him quiet enough," he said in explanation, "but he might come to and give trouble, or try to swim for it, since such cats have many lives. Ah! Señor Ramiro, I told you I would have my sword back before I was half an hour older, or go where I shouldn't want one." Then he touched the spring in the hilt and examined the cavity. "Why," he said, "here's my legacy left in it safe and sound. No wonder my good angel made me mad to get that sword again."

"No wonder," echoed Foy, "especially as you got Ramiro with it," and he glanced at Adrian, who was labouring at the bow oar, looking, now that the excitement of the fight had gone by, most downcast and wretched. Well he might, seeing the welcome that, as he feared, awaited him in Leyden.

For a while they rowed on in silence. All that they had gone through during the last four and twenty hours and the seven preceding months of war and privation, had broken

their nerve. Even now, although they had escaped the danger and won back the buried gold, capturing the arch-villain who had brought them so much death and misery, and their home, which, for the present moment at any rate, was a strong place of refuge, lay before them, still they could not be at ease. Where so many had died, where the risks had been so fearful, it seemed almost incredible that they four should be living and hale, though weary, with a prospect of continuing to live for many years.

That the girl whom he loved so dearly, and whom he had so nearly lost, should be sitting before him safe and sound, ready to become his wife whensoever he might wish it, seemed to Foy also a thing too good to be true. Too good to be true was it, moreover, that his brother, the wayward, passionate, weak, poetical-minded Adrian, made by nature to be the tool of others, and bear the burden of their evil doing, should have been dragged before it was over late, out of the net of the fowler, have repented of his sins and follies, and, at the risk of his own life, shown that he was still a man, no longer the base slave of passion and self-love. For Foy always loved his brother, and knowing him better than any others knew him, had found it hard to believe that however black things might look against him, he was at heart a villain.

Thus he thought, and Elsa too had her thoughts, which may be guessed. They were silent all of them, till of a sudden, Elsa seated in the stern-sheets, saw Adrian suddenly let fall his oar, throw his arms wide, and pitch forward against the back of Martin. Yes, and in place of where he had sat appeared the dreadful countenance of Ramiro, stamped with a grin of hideous hate such as Satan might wear when souls escape him at the last. Ramiro recovered and sitting up, for to his feet he could not rise because of the sword strap, in his hand a thin, deadly-looking knife.

"*Habet!*" he said with a short laugh, "*habes*, Weathercock!" and he turned the knife against himself.

But Martin was on him, and in five more seconds he lay trussed like a fowl in the bottom of the boat.

"Shall I kill him?" said Martin to Foy, who with Elsa was bending over Adrian.

"No," answered Foy grimly, "let him take his trial in Leyden. Oh! what accursed fools were we not to search him!"

Ramiro's face turned a shade more ghastly.

"It is your hour," he said in a hoarse voice, "you have won, thanks to that dog of a son of mine, who, I trust, may linger long before he dies, as die he must. Ah! well, this is what comes of breaking my oath to the Virgin and again lifting my hand against a woman." He looked at Elsa and shuddered, then went on: "It is your hour, make an end of me at once. I do not wish to appear thus before those boors."

"Gag him," said Foy to Martin, "lest our ears be poisoned," and Martin obeyed with good will. Then he flung him down, and there the man lay, his back supported by the kegs of treasure he had worked so hard and sinned so deeply to win, making, as he knew well, his last journey to death and to whatever may lie beyond that solemn gate.

They were passing the island that, many years ago, had formed the turning post of the great sledge race in which his passenger had been the fair Leyden heiress, Lysbeth van Hout. Ramiro could see her now as she was that day; he could see also how that race, which he just failed to win, had been for him an augury of disaster. Had not the Hollander again beaten him at the post, and that Hollander —Lysbeth's own son by another father—helped to it by her son born of himself, who now lay there death-stricken by him that gave him life. . . . They would take him

to Lysbeth, he knew it; she would be his judge, that woman against whom he had piled up injury after injury, whom, even when she seemed to be in his power, he had feared more than any living being. . . . And after he had met her eyes for the last time, then would come the end. What sort of an end would it be for the captain red-handed from the siege of Haarlem, for the man who had brought Dirk van Goorl to his death, for the father who had just planted a dagger between the shoulders of his son because, at the last, that son had chosen to be true to his own people, and to deliver them from a dreadful doom? . . . Why did it come back to him, that horrible dream which had risen in his mind when, for the first time after many years, he met Lysbeth face to face there in the Gevangenhuis, that dream of the pitiful little man falling, falling through endless space, and at the bottom of the gulf two great hands, hands hideous and suggestive, reaching through the shadows to receive him?

Like his son Adrian, Ramiro was superstitious; more, his intellect, his reading, which in youth had been considerable, his observation of men and women, all led him to the conclusion that death is a wall with many doors in it; that on this side of the wall we may not linger or sleep, but must pass each of us through his appointed portal straight to the domain prepared for us. If so, what would be his lot, and who would be waiting to greet him yonder? Oh! terrors may attend the wicked after death, but in the case of some they do not tarry until death; they leap forward to him whom it is decreed must die, forcing attention with their eager, craving hands, with their obscure and ominous voices. . . . About him the sweet breath of the summer afternoon, the skimming swallows, the meadows starred with flowers; within him every hell at which the imagination can so much as hint.

Before he passed the gates of Leyden, in those few short hours, Ramiro, to Elsa's eyes, had aged by twenty years.

Their little boat was heavy laden, the wind was against them, and they had a dying man and a prisoner aboard. So it came about that the day was closing before the soldiers challenged them from the watergate, asking who they were and whither they went. Foy stood up and said:

"We are Foy van Goorl, Red Martin, Elsa Brant, a wounded man and a prisoner, escaped from Haarlem, and we go to the house of Lysbeth van Goorl in the Bree Straat."

Then they let them through the watergate, and there, on the further side, were many gathered who thanked God for their deliverance, and begged tidings of them.

"Come to the house in the Bree Straat and we will tell you from the balcony," answered Foy.

So they rowed from one cut and canal to another till at last they came to the private boat-house of the van Goorls, and entered it, and thus by the small door into the house.

Lysbeth van Goorl, recovered from her illness now, but aged and grown stern with suffering, sat in an armchair in the great parlour of her home in the Bree Straat, the room where as a girl she had cursed Montalvo; where too not a year ago, she had driven his son, the traitor Adrian, from her presence. At her side was a table on which stood a silver bell and two brass holders with candles ready to be lighted. She rang the bell and a woman-servant entered, the same who, with Elsa, had nursed her in the plague.

"What is that murmuring in the street?" Lysbeth asked. "I hear the sound of many voices. Is there more news from Haarlem?"

"Alas! yes," answered the woman. "A fugitive says that the executioners there are weary, so now they tie the poor prisoners back to back and throw them into the mere to drown."

A groan burst from Lysbeth's lips. "Foy, my son, is there," she muttered, "and Elsa Brant his affianced wife, and Martin his servant, and many another friend. Oh! God, how long, how long?" and her head sank upon her bosom.

Soon she raised it again and said, "Light the candles, woman, this place grows dark, and in its gloom I see the ghosts of all my dead."

They burned up—two stars of light in the great room.

"Whose feet are those upon the stairs?" asked Lysbeth presently, "the feet of men who bear burdens. Open the large doors, woman, and let that enter which it pleases God to send us."

So the doors were flung wide, and through them came people carrying a wounded man, then following him Foy and Elsa, and, lastly, towering above them all, Red Martin, who thrust before him another man. Lysbeth rose from her chair to look.

"Do I dream?" she said, "or, son Foy, hath the Angel of the Lord delivered you out of the hell of Haarlem?"

"We are here, mother," he answered.

"And whom," she said, pointing to the figure covered with a cloak, "do you bring with you?"

"Adrian, mother, who is dying."

"Then, son Foy, take him hence; alive, dying, or dead, I have done with——" Here her eyes fell upon Red Martin and the man he held, "Martin the Frisian," she muttered, "but who——"

Martin heard, and by way of answer lifted up his prisoner so that the fading light from the balcony windows fell full upon his face.

"What!" she cried, "Juan de Montalvo as well as his son Adrian, and in this room——" Then she checked herself and added, "Foy, tell me your story."

In few words and brief he told it, or so much as she need know to understand. His last words were: "Mother, be

merciful to Adrian; from the first he meant no ill; he saved all our lives, and he lies dying by that man's dagger."

"Lift him up," she said.

So they lifted him up, and Adrian, who, since the knife pierced him had uttered no word, spoke for the first and last time, muttering hoarsely:

"Mother, take back your words and forgive me—before I die."

Now the sorrow-frozen heart of Lysbeth melted, and she bent over him and said, speaking so that all might hear:

"Welcome to your home again, Adrian. You who once were led astray, have done bravely, and I am proud to call you son. Though you have left the faith in which you were bred, here and hereafter may God bless you and reward you, beloved Adrian!" Then she bent down and kissed his dying lips. Foy and Elsa kissed him also in farewell before they bore him, smiling happily to himself, to the chamber, his own chamber, where within some few hours death found him.

Adrian had been borne away, and for a little while there was silence. Then, none commanding him, but as though an instinct pushed him forward, Red Martin began to move up the length of the long room, half dragging, half-carrying his captive Ramiro. It was as if some automaton had suddenly been put in motion, some machine of gigantic strength that nothing could stop. The man in his grip set his heels in the floor and hung back, but Martin scarcely seemed to heed his resistance. On he came, and the victim with him, till they stood together before the oaken chair and the stern-faced, white-haired woman who sat in it, her cold countenance lit by the light of the two candles. She looked and shuddered. Then she spoke, asking:

"Why do you bring this man to me, Martin?"

"For judgment, Lysbeth van Goorl," he answered.

"Who made me a judge over him?" she asked.

"My master, Dirk van Goorl, your son, Adrian, and Hendrik Brant. Their blood makes you judge of his blood."

"I will have none of it," Lysbeth said passionately, "let the people judge him." As she spoke, from the crowd in the street below there swelled a sudden clamour.

"Good," said Martin, "the people shall judge," and he began to turn towards the window, when suddenly, by a desperate effort, Ramiro wrenched his doublet from his hand, and flung himself at Lysbeth's feet and grovelled there.

"What do you seek?" she asked, drawing back her dress so that he should not touch it.

"Mercy," he gasped.

"Mercy! Look, son and daughter, this man asks for mercy who for many a year has given none. Well, Juan de Montalvo, take your prayer to God and to the people. I have done with you."

"Mercy, mercy!" he cried again.

"Eight months ago," she said, "I uttered that prayer to you, begging of you in the Name of Christ to spare the life of an innocent man, and what was your answer, Juan de Montalvo?"

"Once you were my wife," he pleaded; "being a woman, does not that weigh with you?"

"Once he was my husband, being a man did that weigh with you? The last word is said. Take him, Martin, to those who deal with murderers."

Then that look came upon Montalvo which twice or thrice before Lysbeth has seen written in his face—once when the race was run and lost, and once when in after years she had petitioned for the life of her husband. Lo! it was no longer the face of a man, but such a countenance as might have been worn by a devil or a beast. The eyeball started, the grey moustachios curled upwards, the cheek-bones grew high and sharp.



"Night after night," he gasped, "you lay at my side, and I might have killed you, as I have killed that brat of yours—and I spared you, I spared you."

"God spared me, Juan de Montalvo, that He might bring us to this hour; let Him spare you also if He will. I do not judge. He judges and the people," and Lysbeth rose from her chair.

"Stay!" he cried, gnashing his teeth.

"No, I stay not, I go to receive the last breath of him you have murdered, my son and yours."

He raised himself upon his knees, and for a moment their eyes met for the last time.

"Do you remember?" she said in a quiet voice, "many years ago, in this very room, after you had bought me at the cost of Dirk's life, certain words I spoke to you? Now I do not think that it was I who spoke, Juan de Montalvo."

And she swept past him and through the wide doorway.

Red Martin stood upon the balcony gripping the man Ramiro. Beneath him the broad street was packed with people, hundreds and thousands of them, a dense mass seething in the shadows, save here and again where a torch or a lantern flared showing their white faces, for the moon, which shone upon Martin and his captive, scarcely reached those down below. As gaunt, haggard, and long-haired, he stepped upon the balcony, they saw him and his burden, and there went up such a yell as shook the very roofs of Leyden. Martin held up his hand, and there was silence, deep silence, through which the breath of all that multitude rose in sighs, like the sighing of a little wind.

"Citizens of Leyden, my masters," the Frisian cried, in a great, deep voice that echoed down the street, "I have a word to say to you. This man here—do you know him?"

Back came an answering yell of "*Aye!*"

"He is a Spaniard," went on Martin, "the noble Count

Juan de Montalvo, who many years past forced one Lysbeth van Hout of this city into a false marriage, buying her at the price of the life of her affianced husband, Dirk van Goorl, that he might win her fortune."

"We know it," they shouted.

"Afterwards he was sent to the galleys for his crimes. He came back, and was made Governor of the Gevangenhuis by the bloody Alva, where he brought to death your brother and past burgomaster, Dirk van Goorl. Afterwards he kidnapped the person of Elsa Brant, the daughter of Hendrik Brant, whom the Inquisition murdered at The Hague. We rescued her from him, my master, Foy van Goorl, and I. Afterwards he served with the Spaniards as a captain of their forces in the siege of Haarlem yonder—Haarlem that fell three days ago, and whose citizens they are murdering to-night, throwing them two by two to drown in the waters of the Mere."

"Kill him! Cast him down!" roared the mob. "Give him to us, Red Martin."

Again the Frisian lifted his hand and again there was silence; a sudden, terrible silence.

"This man had a son; my mistress, Lysbeth van Goorl, to her shame and sorrow, was the mother of him. That son, repenting, saved us from the sack of Haarlem, yea, through him the three of us, Foy van Goorl, Elsa Brant, and I, Martin Roos, their servant, are alive to-night. This man and his Spaniards overtook us on the lake, and there we conquered him by the help of Martha the Mare, Martha whom they made to carry her own husband to the fire. We conquered him, but she—she died in the fray; they stabbed her to death in the water as men stab an otter. Well, that son, the Heer Adrian, he was murdered in the boat with a knife-blow given by his own father from behind, and he lies here in this house dead or dying.

"My master and I, we brought this man, who to-day is

called Ramiro, to be judged by the woman whose husband and son he slew. But she would not judge him; she said, 'Take him to the people, let them judge.' So judge now, ye people," and with an effort of his mighty strength Martin swung the struggling body of Ramiro over the parapet of the balcony and let him hang there above their heads.

They yelled, they screamed in their ravenous hate and rage; they leapt up as hounds leap at a wolf upon a wall.

"Give him to us, give him to us!" that was their cry.

Martin laughed aloud. "Take him then," he said; "take him, ye people, and judge him as you will," and with one great heave he hurled the thing that writhed between his hands far out into the centre of the street.

The crowd below gathered themselves into a heap like water above a boat sinking in the heart of a whirlpool. For a minute or more they snarled and surged and twisted. Then they broke up and went away, talking in short, eager sentences. And there, small and dreadful on the stones, lay something that once had been a man.

Thus did the burghers of Leyden pass judgment and execute it upon that noble Spaniard, the Count Juan de Montalvo.

SOME months had gone by,
city of the north, had turne
Full of shame and rage, the
marched upon Leyden, and
end of March, 1574, the to
soldiers were called away t
the leaguer was raised till, on
the gallant Louis, with his bro
of their soldiers, perished, de
more the victorious Spaniard

In a large bare room of the
beginning of the month of Ma
have been seen one morning
tering to himself as he walk
and rather thin in figure, wit
tinged with grey, and a wide
was William of Orange, called
est and most noble of human
age; the man called forth by
its liberties, and who for

with whom he had struggled for all these weary years, was marching in his thousands upon Leyden.

"Money," he was muttering to himself. "Give me money, and I will save the city yet. With money ships can be built, more men can be raised, powder can be bought. Money, money, money—and I have not a ducat! All gone, everything, even to my mother's trinkets and the plate upon my table. Nothing is left, no, not the credit to buy a dozen geldings."

As he thought thus one of his secretaries entered the room.

"Well, Count," said the Prince, "have you been to them all?"

"Yes, sir."

"And with what success?"

"The burgomaster, van de Werff, promises to do everything he can, and will, for he is a man to lean on, but money is short. It has all left the country and there is not much to get."

"I know it," groaned Orange, "you can't make a loaf from the crumbs beneath the table. Is the proclamation put up inviting all good citizens to give or lend in this hour of their country's need?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you, Count, you can go; there is nothing more to do. We will ride for Delft to-night."

"Sir," said the secretary, "there are two men in the courtyard who wish to see you."

"Are they known?"

"Oh yes, perfectly. One is Foy van Goorl, who went through the siege of Haarlem and escaped, the son of the worthy burgher, Dirk van Goorl, whom they did to death yonder in the Gevangenhuis; and the other a Friesland giant of a man called Red Martin, his servant, of whose feats of arms you may have heard. The two of them held

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] they [illegible]
somebody in authority?"

"I don't know, but th
liver it to you in person."

"You are sure of you
added, with a smile. "I ha

"Quite, they were iden
the other room."

"Then admit them, th

"But, sir, they wish to l

"Very well, let them h
the door," answered the Pr
were far from these worthy

Presently the wide doo
Martin appeared, not as he
but as he used to be, well-
even longer and more fier
he was strangely employed
the broad belly-band of a h
between the shafts, he drag
old sail. Moreover the loa
withstanding [illegible]



was the sight, and so inexplicable, that the Prince, forgetting his troubles for a minute, burst out laughing.

"I daresay it looks strange, sir," said Foy, hotly, the colour rising to the roots of his fair hair, "but when you have heard our story I am not sure that you will laugh at us."

"Mynheer van Goorl," said the Prince with grave courtesy, "be assured that I laugh at no true men such as yourself and your servant, Martin the Frisian, and least of all at men who could hold yonder shot tower against fifty Spaniards, who could escape out of Haarlem and bring home with them the greatest devil in Don Frederic's army. It was your equipage I laughed at, not yourselves," and he bowed slightly first to the one and then to the other.

"His Highness thinks perhaps," said Martin, "that the man who does an ass's work must necessarily be an ass," at which sally the Prince laughed again.

"Sir," said Foy, "I crave your patience for a while, and on no mean matter. Your Highness has heard, perhaps, of one Hendrik Brant, who perished in the Inquisition."

"Do you mean the goldsmith and banker who was said to be the richest man in the Netherlands?"

"Yes, sir, the man whose treasure was lost."

"I remember—whose treasure was lost—though it was reported that some of our own people got away with it," and his eyes wandered wonderingly to the sail which hid the burden on the cart.

"Sir," went on Foy, "you heard right; Red Martin and I, with a pilot man who was killed, were they who got away with it, and by the help of the waterwife, who now is dead, and who was known as Mother Martha, or the Mare, we hid it in Haarlemer Meer, whence we recovered it after we escaped from Haarlem. If you care to know how, I will tell you later, but the tale is long and strange. Elsa Brant was with us at the time——"

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]



The Prince put his hand to his forehead and reeled back a step.

"You do not jest with me, Foy van Goorl?" he said.

"Indeed no."

"But stay; this treasure is not yours to give, it belongs to Elsa Brant."

"Sir, the legal title to it is in myself, for my father was Brant's lawful heir and executor, and I inherit his rights. Moreover, although a provision for her is charged upon it, it is Elsa's desire—I have it written here under her hand and witnessed—that the money should be used, every ducat of it, for the service of the country in such way as I might find good. Lastly, her father, Hendrik Brant, always believed that this wealth of his would in due season be of such service. Here is a copy of his will, in which he directs that we are to apply the money 'for the defence of our country, the freedom of religious Faith, and the destruction of the Spaniards in such fashion and at such time or times as God shall reveal to us.' When he gave us charge of it also, his words to me were: 'I am certain that thousands and tens of thousands of our folk will live to bless the gold of Hendrik Brant.' On that belief too, thinking that God put it into his mind, and would reveal His purpose in His own hour, we have acted all of us, and therefore for the sake of this stuff we have gone to death and torture. Now it has come about as Brant foretold; now we understand why all these things have happened, and why we live, this man and I, to stand before you, sir, to-day, with the hoard unminished by a single florin, no, not even by Martin's legacy."

"Man, you jest, you jest!" said Orange.

Foy made a sign, and Martin going to the cart, pulled off the sail-cloth, revealing the five mud-stained barrels painted, each of them, with the mark B. There, too, ready for the purpose, were a hammer, mallet, and chisel. Resting the shafts of the cart upon a table, Martin climbed into it,

rotted, save for those pear
which were in the watertig
to the open floor, where tl
beans shot from a sack in

"I think there is only t
quietly; "the rest, which a
coin. Here, sir, is the inv
list and see that we have ke

But William of Orange h
the priceless gems and mu
of men, convoys of food, m
goodwill—aye, and the Net
the grip of Spain, the Neth
O God! I thank Thee Who
men to the salvation of this

Then in the sudden ecst
Prince hid his face in his h

Thus it came about tha
when Leyden lay at her last
the fleets which [illegible]

the blood of Dirk van Goorl were not shed in vain; that not in vain also did Elsa suffer the worst torments of a woman's fear in the Red Mill on the marshes; and Foy and Martin play their parts like men in the shot-tower, the Gevangenhuis and the siege, and Mother Martha the Sword find a grave and rest in the waters of the Haarlem Meer.

There are other morals to this story also, applicable, perhaps, to our life to-day, but the reader is left to guess them.

Scene the Second

Leyden is safe at last, and through the broken dykes Foy and Martin, with the rescuing ships, have sailed, shouting and red-handed, into her famine-stricken streets. For the Spaniards, those that are left of them, are broken and have fled away from their forts and flooded trenches.

So the scene changes from warring, blood-stained, triumphant Holland to the quiet city of Norwich and a quaint gabled house in Tombland almost beneath the shadow of the tall spire of the cathedral, which now for about a year had been the home of Lysbeth van Goorl and Elsa Brant. Here to Norwich they had come in safety in the autumn of 1573 just before the first siege of Leyden was begun, and here they had dwelt for twelve long, doubtful, anxious months. News, or rather rumours, of what was passing in the Netherlands reached them from time to time; twice even there came letters from Foy himself, but the last of these had been received many weeks ago just as the iron grip of the second leaguer was closing round the city. Then Foy and Martin, so they learned from the letter, were not in the town but with the Prince of Orange at Delft, working hard at the fleet which was being built and armed for its relief.

After this there was a long silence, and none could tell what had happened, although a horrible report reached them that Leyden had been taken, sacked, and burnt, and

[illegible]

"If my [illegible] Elsa,
[illegible] as many
to the Will of God, not because
[illegible] as well as sweetheart.

"Would that I had never le

"You asked to leave, chil
bided the best or the worst in

"It is true, it is because I an

"He wished it, Elsa, there
await the issue in patience. C

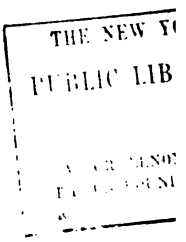
They sat themselves down to
but at their board were laid
expected guests. Yet none
Elsa's fancy.

"Foy and Martin *might* cor
if it seemed that we did not ex
three months or more she had
table, and I [illegible]



THAT VERY NIGHT FOY CAME




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"Hark!" said Lysbeth suddenly, "I hear my son's footstep at the door. It seems, Elsa, that, after all, the ears of a mother are quicker than those of a lover."

But Elsa never heard her, for now—now at length, she was wrapped in the arms of Foy; the same Foy, but grown older and with a long pale scar across his forehead.

"Yet," went on Lysbeth to herself, with a faint smile on her white and stately face, "the son's lips are for the lover first."

An hour later, or two, or three, for who reckoned time that night when there was so much to hear and tell, while the others knelt before her, Foy and Elsa hand in hand, and behind them Martin like a guardian giant, Lysbeth put up her evening prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

"Almighty God," she said in her slow, sonorous voice, "Thy awful Hand that by my own faithless sin took from me my husband, hath given back his son and mine who shall be to this child a husband, and for us as for our country over sea, out of the night of desolation is arisen a dawn of peace. Above us throughout the years is Thy Everlasting Will, beneath us when our years are done, shall be Thy Everlasting Arms. So for the bitter and the sweet, for the evil and the good, for the past and for the present, we, Thy servants, render Thee glory, thanks, and praise, O God of our fathers, That fashioneth us and all according to Thy desire, remembering those things which we have forgotten and foreknowing those things which are not yet. Therefore to Thee, Who through so many dreadful days hast led us to this hour of joy, be glory and thanks, O Lord of the living and the dead. Amen."

And the others echoed "To Thee be glory and thanks, O Lord of the living and the dead. Amen."

Then, their prayer ended, the living rose, and, with separations done and fears appeased at last, leant towards

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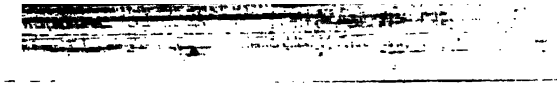
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